Mink Trapping

A Deep and Complete Long Lining System

By DON POWELL

First Printing

Designed and printed by:
Register Lakota Printing
PO Box 28
Chamberlain, South Dakota 57325
1-800-284-3348

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Introduction

It is not uncommon to hear trappers ofall ages and experience levels proclaim the thrill they experience each time they find a fuzzy tail floating above their trap. I am no different. I write this book in an effort to encourage others to enjoy the challenge and excitement I have found by spending time planning, strategizing and pursuing the mink.

Since the first day my granddad gave me a #1 victor longspring I have thirsted for the answers to catching furbearers. I believe I have over the years read, watched and listened to anyone who wanted to share their ideas for free or for fee with me. As my methods have all in someway been compiled from my extensive library of books, videos, and publications I say thank you to those who have contributed. In the writing ofthis book I recognize that I drink from a well that I did not dig. To those who have helped quench my thirst for knowledge I say thank you. The theory this book discusses will enable a focused mink trapper to develop a plan for action. By sharing the ideas in this book I hope I can bridge the gaps of time and distance that separate us. This is my effort to dig the well a little deeper so others can drink as I have. In this book I hope you find ideas which help you catch more mink. Enjoy the journey.

What a Christmas for a 10-year old — a pellet gun and 3-#2 Victor Coilsprings

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back—Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

Goethe

Characteristics of Importance

The subject of our pursuit is classified by researchers as species mustela vison. However, I mean no disrespect by referring to it commonly as the mink.

A mink is not very big relative to many furbearers. It is bigger than its cousin the weasel yet smaller than the also related skunk. The unrelated muskrat is normally thicker but not as long. The mink has short legs. Males are bigger than females. Mink have the prettiest little tails especially when floating in the water. The tail measures approximately 6 - 10" and this accounts for approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of its length.

The long rich brown fur of the mink has been a prize forever. A small white spot is typical on the underside.

Tracks are hard to find because mink only weigh on average between 1.5 to 3.5 pounds and this weight is distributed over a body which is long and skinny. They do leave sign but because of the composition of many surfaces the sign is sometimes hard to detect. Muddy banks often expose the mink's track. Careful observation of the faint marks left by their toe nails will soon show their traveling patterns and prove a population exists. The mink is generally solitary. Groups are usually only found to be mothers and young of that year.

How blessed we are when we catch a glimpse or discover a track. Because they are not conspicuous many feel they are rare. However, most areas do have a mink population. Sign in the form of scat on logs, ledges, or rocks is usually only a little thicker than a pen and half as long. Within the scat you may find bone, hair, scales or crayfish parts.

The census of the population is difficult since they are seldom abundant in one area.

Mink are great teachers and as snow covers the ground the little professors can quickly give veteran and beginning trappers an education. Mink may travel with no particular routine or concern for time. They may travel miles in one night and not move much for a couple more. But, they will move and this is a good thing to remember. Mink can be found anywhere but they are often found along watercourses- dry ditches, wet trickles, meandering streams, and rivers. Still, you may find a mink chasing a rabbit in a cornfield, a squirrel in a patch of grapevines, a mouse in a roadside ditch, a muskrat along a bank, or a trout in the bottom of a fishing hole.

The males do seem to be greater wanderers especially as January and February approach. They are polygamous and I'm told they begin mating in January and the gestation period is believed to be between 45- 54 days. Researchers say this varies because of delayed implantation. Thus, most young are born by April. Mothers have average litters of between 4-5 kits. The baby mink's mortality rate is high. At maturity they have 34 teeth.

Mink appear to often live in one room dives in rooms vacated by muskrats or just a convenient hole. They may not stay in one place long with the exception of a female raising a litter or one that may have found a plentiful food source.

The mink can be found somewhere in the middle of the food chain where they play a role as both the hunter and as the hunted.

The mink is at times capable of fighting off a coyote and resourceful enough to avoid an attack by a hawk. However in such attacks the little guys would have their paws full and the odds would not be in their favor – still don't bet against them. Domestic pets such as cats and dogs can also thin the population. Birds of prey including owls at night are their natural enemy. Yet, cars and contaminants in many areas probably cause more deaths. Studies of contaminant response data shows that reproductive failure results in reduced kit weight and poor kit survival. Pollution even in small amounts has been shown in research to be more of a threat to the population than any living creature.

The mink is an opportunistic hunter which prefers to kill but will scavenge. They are not above theft and they will cache food for later use. They will eat trout and most other fish, including catfish and bluegills. Muskrats, mice, rats, frogs, snakes and crayfish are some of the mink's favorite food sources.

Points of interest and bank structure that is suitable for rodents, like sewer rats, field mice or muskrats yells out MINK Lunch to me. Streams with soft banks which are great for muskrats and waterways with rocky bottoms ideal for crayfish will both hold mink populations. Rip rap under bridges designed to prevent erosion is another location for prey to hide so you'll find mink will investigate such buffets. Mink can swim good enough to live on a fish diet and they don't mind taking a look at the bottom of a pool or under a root system. Washed up logs and leaves and other junk can really pique their curiosity. They really do like to investigate cover be it weeds, grass, brush, or trees which give them a feeling of safety. Like

old coon, big males may be found further away from water and may be much bigger than normal. Females tend to have a smaller territory

Mink do not shy from concentrated travel ways such as culverts and areas under bridges. Mink are nocturnally active on a pretty regular basis. During high water they look along banks where prey may have been forced out of regular areas of refuge. In periods of extreme cold, water temperature is warmer than air temperature thus hunting in the water makes sense. When there is a crust on the snow and the temperature is increasing mink may take to thickets where rabbits enjoy the sun. Remember weather is a big factor.

They do have a tendency to do what is prudent to their survival. They travel in straight lines until they don't want to. Mink hug vertical edges until they lose concern for danger or see opportunity. They stay on dry land until they want to get wet. The little buggers are jumpers, climbers, duckers and squeezers. They aren't strong but they are quick. Mink aren't smart but they will usually take the path of least resistance – unless they don't want to.

Paws

Scat

Mink don't always

Mink don't always do anything so be ready for whatever they do. I like to adjust my trap line with this in mind. They are difficult to trap consistently if a plan is not in place.

You've been told that mink always hug edges – well they often do but they don't always. While they are known as huggers this habit is true only to an extent. Tracks prove that along a vertical structure they may veer off in any given direction a fact too often lost on many trappers.

Liken their population's habits to ours. Some citizens enjoy walks in the woods others jog on sidewalks and some just walk to the refrigerator from the couch and to the bathroom. Some humans feel a need to climb a tree, others a mountain, others have been there done that and no longer choose to do so. We analyze risk and reward and make our decisions according to a thought process. Mink survive by making instinctive choices. So mink like us may choose to go over, around, under through or turn the other way if perceived danger is possibly around the corner. They have a survival instinct which causes some to be motivated more by fear than reward.

We are hard to figure out and so are mink.

The key to catching mink in big numbers is understanding their travel and behavior patterns and remembering they don't always do anything.

Tracks

Mink Trapping Theory

I do catch mink but mink trapping is as much about handling failure as it is success. The excitement of a new set's promise is hard to describe to those who don't trap and dream at the same time. However, in the real world of mink trapping, the best mink trappers check many sets for an entire season and then on the last day of the season pull those traps having never caught anything in a substantial percentage of those traps.

Baseball players understand that success in 3 of 10 at bats is acceptable. Mink trappers also must understand that their traps will be empty more often than they are full.

So be prepared to strike out. The key is you have to keep swinging and improving.

We know that mink travel on ground and in the water and are proficient at satisfying their hunger in both environments. So, our theory suggests we should set accordingly.

Our system should be designed to cover as much territory as possible with routes which avoid multiple stops on the same water course.

We also understand that a mink may only visit our location once or twice in a short season. Thus, our system should attempt to cover the area the mink will most likely visit when passing. This means high banks, water's edge, water surface and the bottoms of our water ways. This type of tier trapping will test our efficiency Thus, we should have our equipment organized, prepared and uniform.

Our systematic theory uses a plan designed in accordance with where you want to be at a point in time.

You not only build a daily, weekly and season plan but also a long range plan,

In this year's plan you break down preseason and in season. Further dividing preseason into an entire year's plan of events. The in season plan is divided into stages which change in the early season, midseason and end of season.

A mink trapper must maintain balance in their work and personal lives. To catch your desired number of mink and lose your health and or family would be a catastrophe which is a price much too high to pay.

So herein we work together to decide what you want to accomplish, know what you have accomplished and develop a plan for the future. You will develop your resources including help, locations, methods, skills, uniform traps, equipment, and tools.

The jist of the system requires that you have traps set and that you oversee their ability to operate. (Check always and neglect never).

You need to develop a strategy and a plan for development.

Set new traps everyday, maintain ones that are set, pull only those that cost you efficiency, be organized and think.

In short, set as many traps as needed over the greatest distance at the best locations with sets which cover as many different options of travel as the mink may have and have those sets working and effective.

Critical Mass

To understand what it takes to successfully take mink in numbers it is necessary to accept the critical mass concept.

Critical mass is a point defined by an amount which you need to reach

The author inspects a portion of his finished mink

before an event will take place. Our mink trapping theory suggests that it is necessary to set a lot of traps over a large distance and allow the traps enough time to let the mink encounter them.

In analyzing this theory we find that there is a point we need to reach to begin seeing consistent catch results. This is our critical mass and the term can be applied to numerous areas of mink trapping.

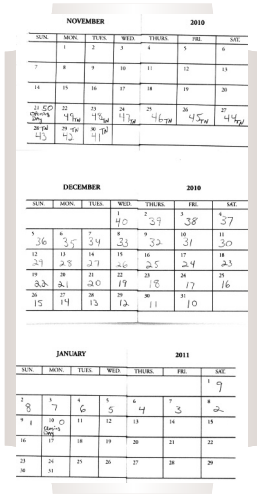
First we need to have a certain number of locations spread out over a significant number of miles, second a certain number of traps, third a certain number of sets and 4th a certain number of trap nights.

A trapper may dig the perfect pocket and place the trap just as instructed. Yet, if no mink comes along the trapper will not be taking home his desired prize. If a mink comes along on the opposite shore and does not notice the set he will again not catch one. But, if the trapper can cover many miles, encounter many passing mink, with many sets and many traps he will begin to consistently catch mink. The numbers are really the key to mink trapping. Reaching critical mass requires work to reach the various amounts needed but at that point mink trapping becomes more than you could ever hope for.

Trap Nights?

Critical mass as previously discussed boils down to numbers. Trap nights are one such number which you will need comprehend in order to reach your goal.

I consider a trap night as a 24 hour period (specifically 1 evening for relevance to furbearers which are primarily nocturnal) in which a trap is exposed, operable and capable of catching the targeted animal. Trap nights are calculated by multiplying the number of set traps by the number of nights set. Thus, if a trapper has 10 sets in operation for 20 days he has accumulated a total of 200 trap nights. I calculate on a calendar the length of the season and mark the first day as the total. As an example in a 50 day season I would mark down opening day as day 50 and the second day as 49 then I know that if I set 50 traps in blind sets on the first day I will have 2500 trap nights accumulated by the end of the season from those sets. If I set 50 pockets the next day I will accumulate 49x 50 =2450 from those alone. If a trap which was set on the first day is pulled early say 10 days before the end of the season I would calculate that traps nights as follows. 50 less the 10 to give me 40 trap nights for that particular set. For mink trapping it is helpful to have a calendar for 2 different years since the year changes in the middle of the season. See the attached calendars to understand the method for calculating these keys to reaching your goals.



Make your own calendar to calculate trap nights

Self Analysis

Mink trapping is not a series of unrelated events. What you do today will affect tomorrow.

Now that you know a little about the mink you need to find out about yourself.

What motivates you? Are you a producer because of internal or external rewards?

Internal is how you feel because of what you accomplished

External is how you feel when you get money for the furs, or because you caught more than someone else.

What are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

Analyze your resources.

Financially — are you able to make a commitment to run a trap line and still feed your family or yourself. Can you pay your bills? Should you devote the time spent trapping on some other more productive responsibility such as work?

Physically — are you able to withstand the demands of setting, checking traps and putting up fur?

Family — do you have the support of your family and can you take the time to handle a trapline without causing marital problems or damaging relationships with parents or children?

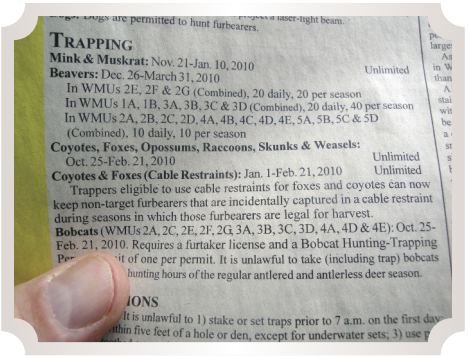
Help — are you able to enlist the help of others for setting, checking and skinning?

Time — are you able to check traps on a daily basis or are there days you will not be available?

Skill — Have you learned the proper methods and techniques

Education — do you have access to publications, mentors, videos, books and other resources?

Facilities — where will you store your traps, equipment, tools, and fur? Can you find a place suitable for skinning and fleshing?


TRAPPING

Mink & Muskrat: Nov. 21-Jan. 10, 2010

Beavers: Dec. 26-March 31, 2010 Unlimited

In WMUs 2E, 2F & 2G (Combined), 20 daily, 20 per season

In WMUs 1A, 1B, 3A, 3B, 3C & 3D (Combined), 20 daily, 40 per season

In WMUs 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 5A, 5B, 5C & 5D (Combined), 10 daily, 10 per season

Coyotes, Foxes, Opossums, Raccoons, Skunks & Weasels: Oct. 25-Feb. 21, 2010 Unlimited

Coyotes & Foxes (Cable Restraints): Jan. 1-Feb. 21, 2010 Unlimited

Trappers eligible to use cable restraints for foxes and coyotes can now keep non-target furbearers that are incidentally captured in a cable restraint during seasons in which those furbearers are legal for harvest.

Bobcats (WMUs 2A, 2C, 2E, 2F, 2G, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 4A, 4D & 4E): Oct. 25-Feb. 21, 2010. Requires a furtaker license and a Bobcat Hunting-Trapping Pe… of one per permit. It is unlawful to take (including trap) bobcats … hunting hours of the regular antlered and antlerless deer season.

…ONS

…It is unlawful to 1) stake or set traps prior to 7 a.m. on the first day … within five feet of a hole or den, except for underwater sets; 3) use …

Know your State laws and seasons

Transportation — will you check your traps by horse, bicycle, motorcycle, foot, car or truck? Is your transportation functionally and economically feasible?

Locations — do you have permission and locations available to trap?

Population — do you have mink in your area?

Legal — do you know the seasons and laws pertaining to trapping?

Can you put it all together in a coordinated plan with strategies and tactics that are effective and legal?

Self examination begins your checkup from the neck up.

The challenge is going out and developing management numbers before you try to take theirs. Remember life is a series of related events and mink trapping is no different.

Building of Purpose

I believe the mediocrity assumption which is cast upon some trappers implies that the average person will avoid work if he can. However, when studying trappers who reach above average production we see that mental and physical effort are natural and not disliked any more than play or rest. This especially holds true if you have set a goal and can associate the work with the reward of catching mink and use your success as satisfaction of ego and purpose. Therefore, we need to never lose site of our purpose and must strive to satisfy our sense of accomplishment. Learn to celebrate small successes and take pleasure in catching muskrats as well as mink and never let the hard work required deter you from striving to achieve. If you find your purpose then mediocrity will not visit your trapline because you will overcome any barriers to success.

Building of Values

What we believe is what we become and therefore the early understanding of what is ethical becomes important.

A simple list of a mink trapper's values follows:

-Leave each location better than you found it.
-Be grateful to land owners who grant permission and respect those who don't.
-Never interfere with the traps or catch of others.
-Don't take unfair advantage of any person or animal.
-Conserve our resources and respect our rights to enjoy our natural resources.
-Obey all laws, including observation of check requirements.
-Belong to our trapping organizations and fight for our rights to trap and bear arms.

Photo of author proudly displaying his lifetime membership awards in the National Trappers Association, Pennsylvania Trapper's Association and the Ohio State Trapper's Association.

The Rule of the Farm

Life on a farm teaches you that if you wish to harvest in the fall you must plant in the spring. You will reap what you sow. On your trap line you will receive in direct proportion to the effort you make to be productive.

Friction

A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials.

Chinese Proverb

Friction comes in many forms. You can sense friction when systems, preparation and organization are not complete and efficient.

The cost of friction is great.

A mink trapper should have a passion for preparation.

Not having standardized equipment is a preparation oversight that will slow down any one attempting to reach a desired goal.

Overlapping of territorial coverage and setting too many locations on one stream results in a form of friction.

Wasted steps in setting and checking your traps will also waste time and lead to inefficiencies.

Trespassing issues will cause you to lose focus.

Lost traps result in wasted time looking for the missing equipment.

Lost animals result in wasted resources and opportunities not to mention dollars.

Therefore the serious mink trapper will identify areas to increase his efficiencies and eliminate friction.

After one of the worst Pennsylvania winters in decades, the author displays a protion of his catch.

Key Management Numbers

Feedback is important in everything and trapping is no different.

In business the experts say “the numbers don’t lie”.

In baseball the manager is concerned about a hitter’s overall batting average and his average in certain situations such as with runners in scoring position.

In football a quarterback is rated on wins and a complicated formula which considers among other things yards per completion, completion percentage, interceptions and touchdowns.

In fact in all competitive sports including golf, racing, tennis and bowling statistics are studied. Statistics can help show areas of strength and weakness. The numbers can let you know if you are on the right path and if you are making progress.

You should know what your batting average is with respect to your trapping skills. Analyze your numbers now so you can see if the changes you make result in more productivity. If you don’t know where you are now it will be difficult to map out a course of action to take you where you want to go.

I will acknowledge at this point that some trappers will not choose to continue this analysis. The fact is not all turtles make it back to the sea.

Analysis of the Past-your starting point.

Answer the following questions on a worksheet. The numbers you find can serve as your feedback and benchmarks for improvement.

QUICK MATH COURSE

To find a percentage take the total and divide it into the smaller number.

Ex. What % of 4 is 2? 2/4 = .5 or 50%

If we ask how many mink per location then per means divide. So if we had caught 50 mink and we had 100 locations we would take 50/100 and find .5 or ½ a mink for each location set.

Calculate your key management numbers

The basic information we need from your last trapline follows:

Results

*How many mink did you catch last year?*_____

From what parts of your line did your catch come?

(Take a map and indicate by dots the locations where you caught mink)

This will show you what areas are productive and therefore should not be overlooked or lost.

If you see areas of your line without production determine if different methods will help or if a different location might be better.

Length of Season and available time to trap

How long was the mink season? _____days From_____to _____

How many days did you trap mink last season?

When did you start? Opening day or later?

Mink per day = Mink caught divided by days trapped=_____

In this section you will see how you are utilizing the available days and then look for ways to be ready from day 1 and keep sets working until the last day of the season.

Utilization of time

Days available to trap = length of season in days

% of available days trapped = season length / days trapped

Divide the season into segments (weeks, quarters, half, month)

Sets made per week(first, . . . last)

In this section determine your strengths and weaknesses. Do you start strong and finish early or do you have trouble getting started and finish strong. On my line I have conflicting interests early in the season since I enjoy deer and bear hunting I need to trap at night in order to do both.

Line Development

How many days did you take to get the majority of your line set out?

Number of traps set the first day?

Number of traps set the first week?

Number of traps set in the entire season?

Number of traps added each day on average?

KEY # — Average # of Hours/ day spent setting

Do certain days vary in length of available time?

With regards to line development standardization of your equipment and traps as well as preparation will help you get the line out as soon as possible. Here is where a determined mind set and plan really becomes important.

Delining

How many days did you spend pulling your line?

When did you pull your line?

Last days of the season or before?

KEY # —

Getting all the traps set is one thing but getting them all back is another. Your system should be thought out carefully to stay within the limit of the law and still catch those late numbers which are really on the move looking for love. Premature removal will result in a lower mink total.

Line configuration

How many different lines did you run? KEY # —
Did you break your line down into components by area-
How many? KEY # —
How many alternative component routes were planned?

To cover the most area and understand the value of alternatives when an area isn't producing is a key part of consistently taking mink. Consider interchangeable sections which may be plugged in to your line when needed.

Line structure and design

Single loop
Straight Line
Multiple loops
KEY # — Mink per loop

Loops give you the option to break up your day when needed. Here you can check loops in the morning and others after work.

Line Length

Length of line in miles? KEY # —
KEY # — How many miles/ day?
KEY # — Total # of Stops?
Stops/day ?
KEY # — Mink per mile
Total time required to check your line?
Time to check per mile
Time to set per mile

Here you can see if your line is producing because of exposure to many different mink or if you are under covering or over setting an area. Mileage will be affected by available time, ease of checking, and speed of travel .

Total cost of gas per day, per week, per month, per season?
Cost per mile
Cost per mink

Here you can see if another mode of transportation may be prudent or if additional animals should be targeted to offset your costs.

Resources -TRAPS

How many mink traps do you have available?
KEY # —
What trap types do you have available?
How many legholds?
How are your legholds modified?
Did you have mink pans on your legholds?
How many bodygrippers?
How are your body grippers modified?

Did you use any treadles vs wire triggers on your bodygrippers?
How many mink Traps did you set last year?
KEY # — Mink per trap
KEY # — What % of traps were used

To identify the number of traps needed and the types that you prefer your plan should keep an updated inventory. There is a place for both legholds and bodygrippers on the mink line and each should have modifications to increase their effectiveness.

Utilization of Resources

% of available traps set= total traps suitable for mink/ total set for mink
How many legholds?
KEY # — Mink per leghold
How many bodygrippers?
KEY # — Mink per bodygripper
KEY # — % of sets using legholds
KEY # — % of sets using bodygrippers

Having traps is different than having traps set. Plan to cover each location efficiently and utilize the traps you have available. They won't catch much in your garage or pickup. If you are setting one particular style of trap more than another then you may be able to pick up more mink with a more balanced approach.

Trap nights

Maximization of time and traps

Total trap nights= # of traps x calender nights set
Calculate by calling trap #1 as t1 and trap #2 t2 etc.

T1 x days set + t2 x days set+ t3 x days set…….=total trap nights

Or if on day 1, 75 traps were set take 75 x 50 days set = 3750 Trap nights
Traps per stop = total traps/ total stops

Get your traps out as soon as possible and leave them out as long as possible. Then cover all of your locations with primary sets and with the extra traps develop as fully as possible each location with secondary sets.

Efficiency of time and effort

Mink per trap night= KEY # —

Your mink production will increase as your locations, methods and systems develop. With focused effort this key number will increase.

Line composition

of Streams trapped last year KEY # —
How many stops on each stream? KEY # —
How many ponds did you set?
How many traps per pond?
How many swamps did you set?
How many traps per swamp?
Mink per stream KEY # —
Mink per stop KEY # —
Mink per pond
Mink per swamp

Don't overlook any area that holds a mink population. Your line com-

position should cover as many different water sheds as possible. You should strive to have a low number of stops per stream and a high number of mink per stop.

You also want to recognize what types of stops require more traps for coverage.

Areas of Concern

How many visitations and misses did you notice?

Here you may find that a better understanding of trap positioning is required or a more appealing enticement.

How many incidental catches of muskrat, coon and others occurred?

Here you may find that different methods should be employed unless incidentals are desired.

How many traps were stolen from you last year and in what area?

This number can tell you where theft occurs. If theft occurs in a certain type of location? If thief is looking for a certain type of set.

Did you lose any traps to flooding or animals getting away?

This should cause you to examine your methods of attachment and anchoring.

In this area you will see if your traps are in need of adjustment, stronger springs or other modifications.

Areas of PRODUCTIVITY

How many years have you been trapping mink?

How many mink have you caught in your lifetime (estimated)?

Can you list all the spots that will apply to your upcoming line, where you previously caught a mink.

How many lines did you have set up?

Are your past successes in the same area you are planning to trap next year?

From how many of your locations did you catch a mink last year? KEY # —

From what % of your locations caught a mink?

KEY # —

Total mink___ Mink per location

# of mink	% of	Types of locations	# of traps	Production %
		Bridges		
		Culverts		
		Stream bank		
		Root systems		
		Pools		
		Dry trail		

Total caught /#of days = mink per day

Total caught first week /total mink caught in season = % caught in first week

Total mink caught in November /Total mink caught in season= % caught per month of November

Total mink caught in December /Total mink caught in season = % caught per month of December

Total mink caught in January/Total mink caught in season = % caught per month of January

Total mink caught/ total miles =Mink per mile

Total mink caught / total traps set= mink per trap

Total mink caught / total locations set= mink per location

These numbers may begin to tell you if changing weather conditions are hurting your productivity.

Methods used

Do you know which methods are the most effective for you?

In what sets did you catch mink (list each mink caught, where, when, how, in what)

Trap types - In what type of traps did you catch mink?

In legholds

In bodygrippers

Total Sets

# of Blind sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Wet Surface blind
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Bottom edge
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Crossovers
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of trail sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of pocket sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of floats
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Bottom baited
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of body gripper boxes/tubes
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of other sets what types?
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

Productivity per method

Total Sets Total Mink
# of blinds_____, ____ % of sets, Mink per blind set___ % of mink_____
# of pockets _____, ____ % of sets, Mink per set___ % of mink_____
# of _____, ____ % of sets, Mink per set___ % of mink_____

Now you can see what methods are the most productive for you. This should show what other methods you need to try more frequently and you may note that some methods should be improved to increase the effectiveness.

Location analysis-
How many Water sheds KEY # —
Mink per watershed KEY # —
Streams
Mink per stream KEY # —
Streams per water shed KEY # —

This will show us that by increasing our numbers of water sheds and then cover each properly we can increase the numbers of mink we have available to catch

Types of streams
River
Mink per river
Creek
Mink per creek
Small feeder
Mink per feeder

The types of water you are trapping on will show your tendencies and preferences as well as the productivity. You may find that as the seasons change one area becomes more productive.

Locations
Locations per mile
Locations per stream
How many of these places did you set a trap ?
How many culverts?
KEY # —
How many Bridges?
KEY # —

How many streams big enough to float a power boat down ? KEY # —
How many streams big enough to float a canoe down? KEY # —
How many trout streams? KEY # —
How many streams that you can wade across with chest waders?
How many streams small enough to jump across ?
How many tributaries(smaller streams) empty into each of these bigger streams?
How many streams did you set?
How many stops on each stream?
How many ponds can you identify?
How many swamps can you identify

Productivity of Location types

Total locations Total Mink
# of culverts _____, ____ % of locations, Mink per culverts set___ % of mink_____
# of bridges _____, ____ % of locations, Mink per bridge set___ % of mink_____
% of stops that caught mink KEY # —
Mink per stop KEY # —
This indicates how efficiently you choose your locations
Mink per pond KEY # —
This indicates how ponds help add to your total and
Time per pond tells us the cost of these locations - how wise it is to set ponds if you have to walk far and catch few consider eliminating this option.
Incidental per pond KEY # —
Mink per bridge KEY # —
Average Time spent per bridge KEY # — checking, setting
Incidental per bridge KEY # —
Mink per culvert KEY # —
Time per culvert KEY # — checking, setting
Incidental per culvert
Mink per swamp
Time per swamp KEY # — checking, setting
Incidental per swamp
Total Traps stolen
Traps stolen Per bridge
Per culvert
Per pond
Per swamp
In the above findings you can notice that certain areas produce more

than others perhaps because of the methods used. However, some areas require more effort than others and opportunity costs should not be overlooked.

Productivity of watersheds

Total water sheds Total Mink
% of streams that caught mink
Mink per stream
Stops per stream
Traps per stream

Incidental per blind
Incidental per pocket

Anchors and Connectors

What types of anchors do you primarily use?
How do you typically attach your traps to your anchors?
Do you own any rr tie plates?
Do you use rr tie plates?

Line – logistics concerning care and maintenance

Average # of Hours/day spent checking

Pelting operations

Average # of Hours /day spent skinning
Speed – miles per hour

Key numbers from year to year

20_ _ 20_ _ 20_ _
How many mink did you catch?_____
How many days did you trap mink last season?
Mink per day?
length of season in days
% of available days trapped
Number of traps set the first day?
Number of traps set the first week?
Number of traps set in the entire season?
Number of traps added each day on average?
Average # of Hours/day spent setting
How many days did you spend pulling your line?
Did you pull your line last days of the season or before?
How many different lines did you run?
How many components?
How many alternative component routes were planned?
How many loops?
Mink per loop
Length of line in miles?
How many miles/day?
Total # of Stops?
Stops/day?
Mink per mile

Total time required to check your line?
Time to check per mile
Time to set per mile
Total cost of gas per day, per week, per month, per season?
Cost per mile
Cost per mink
How many mink traps do you have available?
How many legholds?
Are your legholds modified?
Did you have mink pans on your legholds?
How many bodygrippers?
Are your body grippers modified?
Did you use any treadles on your bodygrippers?
How many mink Traps did you set last year?
Mink per trap
What % of traps were used?
% of available traps set
How many legholds?
Mink per leghold
How many bodygrippers?
Mink per bodygripper
% of sets using legholds
% of sets using bodygrippers
Total trap nights
Traps per stop
Mink per trap night
# of Streams trapped
How many stops on each stream?
How many ponds did you set?
How many traps per pond?
How many swamps did you set?
How many traps per swamp?
Mink per stream
Mink per stop
Mink per pond
Mink per swamp
How many visitations and misses did you notice?
How many incidental catches of muskrat?
How many incidental catches of coon?
How many incidental catches of other?
How many traps were stolen from you last year?
How many traps were lost to flooding or animals getting away?
From what percentage of your locations did you catch a mink?
Total mink___
Mink per location

# of mink	% of Types of locations	# of traps	Production %
	Bridges		
	Culverts		
	Stream bank		
	Root systems		
	Pools		
	Dry trail		

Mink per day
% caught in first week
% caught per month of November
% caught per month of December
% caught per month of January
Mink per mile
Mink per trap
Mink per location
Mink per legholds
Mink per bodygrippers
Total Sets
# of Blind sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Wet Surface blind
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Bottom edge
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Crossovers
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of trail sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of pocket sets
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of floats
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of Bottom baited
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of body gripper boxes/tubes
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

# of other sets what types?
% of total
In legholds
In bodygrippers

Productivity per method

Total Sets
Total Mink
# of blinds
% of sets ,
Mink per blind set
% of mink
# of pockets
% of sets , Mink per set
% of mink
# of
% of sets , Mink per set
% of mink
How many Water sheds
Mink per watershed
Streams
Mink per stream
Streams per water shed KEY # —
Types of streams
- River
  - Mink per river
- Creek
  - Mink per creek
- Small feeder
  - Mink per feeder

Total Locations
Locations per mile
Locations per stream
How many culverts?

How many Bridges?
How many streams big enough to float a power boat down ?
How many streams big enough to float a canoe down?
How many trout streams?
How many streams that you can wade across with chest waders?
How many streams small enough to jump across?
How many streams did you set?
How many stops on each stream?

Total locations
Total Mink
# of culverts
% of locations
Mink per culverts set
% of mink
# of bridges
% of locations
Mink per bridge set
% of mink
% of stops that caught mink
Mink per stop
Mink per pond
Time per pond
Incidental per pond
Mink per bridge
Average Time spent per bridge
checking,
setting
Incidental per bridge
Mink per culvert
Time per culvert
checking,
setting
Incidental per culvert
Mink per swamp
Time per swamp
Checking
setting
Incidental per swamp
Total Traps stolen
Traps stolen Per bridge
Per culvert
Per pond
Per swamp
Total water sheds
Total Mink
% of streams that caught mink
Mink per stream

Stops per stream
Traps per stream
Incidental per blind
Incidental per pocket

What types of anchors do you primarily use?
How do you typically attach your traps to your anchors?
Do you own any railroad tie plates?
Do you use rr tie plates?
Average # of Hours/day spent checking
Average # of Hours /day spent skinning

Reading and Understanding the Numbers

If you took the time to work on your numbers I'd like to congratulate you -your trapping plan is starting to take off. In fact I could use a jet as a comparison to your trapline. As with a jet to start the engines and get it in the air and then have it safely land at its point of destination requires much fuel. But the interesting point is the majority of the fuel burned happens on the runway before takeoff. The same is true for reaching trapline goals. The majority of the mink you will catch will be as a result of the fuel you burn or energy you spend trying to reach a plan.

The numbers will begin to tell us that if we want to increase our catch we would need to consider doing the following based upon our assumption that our key numbers hold true.

Trap longer — if we'd set for the entire season ____days with____ traps then we'd have _____trap nights at our present rate of _____ mink per trap night we could expect an increase to_____ mink and by trapping _____days at our rate of catch per season indicates_____ mink.

Set more traps if we increased our average number of traps set at each location from to then our catch should increase as calculated traps x rate of catch mink

or

Set more watersheds increase to____ water sheds at_____ mink per shed =___mink

or

Set more streams so____ streams=_____ mink

or

Set more locations say_____ mink per location then to get X mink we'd need_____locations

or

Use more productive blind sets if you set the same number of traps but set all blind sets then traps x (rate of success with blinds) =_____mink

or

Improve our success at pockets if you can improve your success rate at pocket sets from___to ____ then setting the same number as last year = will produce almost____ more mink.

or

Travel further – last year you traveled ___miles per day if you increase your line by more miles to_____ miles then ___ mink per mile would=_____ mink

If we put this all together and say

we trap for ____days

with _____ traps our trap nights would = less setup and pulling time say _____

And if we used sets which increased our average success rate per location to_____ setting traps with more step coverage and

Covering ___ more water sheds

with streams and only ____stop per stream

with_____ traps per stop

traveling miles _____more miles

Therefore, if we do all this you should see a big increase in productivity.

Incremental Changes can make a big difference and exponentially increase your catch numbers.

But we must look deeper. We need to learn how to make quicker sets, cover more area with more streams and have a higher rate of success per stop.

What we should see with this rough plan is that by traveling across water ways and setting only once on each stream our rates should go up especially if we can increase the productivity of more sets.

How many traps did you have available for mink?

Could you convert others?

Could you accumulate more?

Increase your pan size to increase or double your step coverage.

What if you caught very few when it had been raining or snowing and we could add sets that work in all weather?

How can you increase your key management numbers?

There are typically 2 ways

The first is by increasing efficiencies – save time, get faster, get better, increase your rates – in short – get better.

The second is by increasing operations-get bigger- increase your quantity- do more.

A combination of some of the following will be needed but there is opportunity costs involved with each decision since time is limited. Finding more time may be possible by increasing your efficiencies in other areas. However, if you decide that since you were only setting 2 traps per location you will increase the number to an average of 4. You will undoubtedly increase the time required to run your line by doing this.

Now look at your line and begin adding locations and deleting others that are time consuming and unproductive or in close proximity to other stops.

To increase effectiveness and efficiencies with regards to what we are already doing break out each part of your operations.

Eliminate what we have been doing if it is not productive.

Then expand our locations, our sets, our coverage, our territory.

ONLY YOU can make your personalized plan, Only you know what you are willing to do to reach your goals. As you learn from this book, magazines, publications, dvd's and other resources add parts to your yearly plan. Build a trapline that is unparalleled in efficiency. You are the only one who knows what resources you can utilize and what techniques you already implement.

To increase your numbers we must do the following.
Miss fewer mink and opportunities
Travel further
Set more
Learn how to
    Save time
Get better at
Reduce theft
    Pullouts
    misses
increase step coverage
Analyze locations better
Cut out time consuming sets
Eliminate difficult and unproductive stops
Add more watersheds and streams
Find better routes to locations, to access sets and back to the vehicle.

Increase the number we can reach

Start by identifying different water sheds, streams that feed the bigger rivers and creeks that feed the streams. In this way you will get an understanding of how your waterways connect. Your goal is to cover as much area as possible but not cover areas twice. The beginnings of water ways are less prone to flooding and are often productive.

Increase the number of stops

Gain more ground
Decrease the number set per stop in the infancy stage
Increase your initial coverage by setting no more than 2 traps per location.

Increase your step coverage by using mink pans.

Increase the quality of sets

Do everything just a little bit better. Study the suggestions in the following set descriptions.

Specialize each day with a certain set in the building process

Increase your location coverage

Tier setting will provide a variety of sets which are designed to encounter most mink passing through.

Become more efficient with time saving methods.

Use traps of uniform design and setup.

Make sure your ends have a universal swivel for attachment.

Use quick cables

increase your number of locations
increase bodies of water
increase springs

increase number of available sets
increase number of traps
accumulate more and modify
increase efficiency in checking and setting
prepare for a decrease in trap/catch ratio
reduce missed opportunities
increase your step coverage- just modify your existing traps
reduce trigger avoidance – use treadles on your conibears.

Now look at your line and begin adding locations and deleting others that are time consuming unproductive or in close proximity to other stops.

Remember we want to first increase our efficiencies by improving our equipment and perfecting our methods then we can increase the number of watersheds, then our tributaries, then our feeders, then our locations, then our traps.

The challenge is going out and developing your numbers before you try to take theirs. Self examination begins your checkup from the neck up.

There are so many variables that could be analyzed to the point of lost meaning and complexity. You should however be able to determine what types of sets have been effective for you. Do more of what is working and less of what isn't. The value is in the development and analysis of these numbers.

Goals – Begin with the End in Mind – aim, ready, fire

Goals are the beginning to magical results. Many will wallow in the quagmires of mediocrity.

Determination plus ability multiplied by action and know how can equal more mink.

Most trappers who are serious about improving decide where they want to be at the end of the season. I believe you need to decide where you want to be in 3 years, 5 years.

This initial step allows a person a strong foundation to build a plan or strategy to accomplish the ultimate goal. Goals regardless of numbers are essential for focus.

On paper or in computer take note of where you stand at this point in time.

Get the appropriate # of hooks to support your goal installed on your fur shed's ceiling and develop a realistic plan in writing.

Start with your desired number and work backwards. Develop a pre-season plan from the point at which you find yourself.

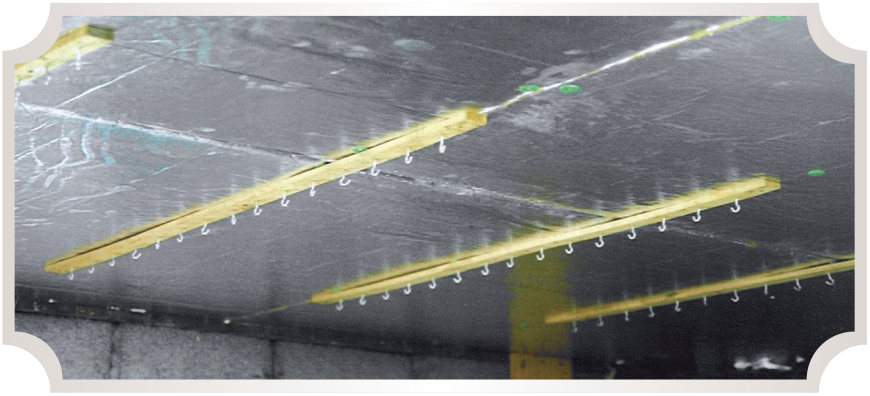
I believe that each mink you catch should be caught twice. Visualize and catch each mink first in your mind then in your trap.

Inventory your desires then be prepared and pace yourself throughout the year and the season. A dog that runs fast doesn't run long

Limits may be present based upon the amount of resources you have available but if you are serious about accomplishing a realistic goal you can make it happen.

Begin with the end in mind

Define your goals quantitatively but don't make conflicting goals. For example to say that you'd like to catch more mink at fewer stops by setting fewer traps and trapping fewer days has many generalizations in the statement, no quantitative target to strive towards and there are many conflicting components.



Begin by anticipating the number you wish to reach.

54 Mink — Trapping part-time in Pennsylvania requires a plan.

Working backwards with your numbers

Goal – 50 mink

If we catch 1 mink for every 2 stops now we need 100 stops

If we catch 1 mink for every 3 traps set then we need to set and tend to . . . 150 . . . traps.

If we catch 1 mink in a season for every 4 miles traveled on our daily line then we need to travel 200 miles per day.

By doing this type of backing in calculations we can quickly see what seems to be unrealistic. For example to travel 2000 miles a day jumps out at us as being unrealistic so we need to drastically improve this number.

Work Towards A Goal This Year

As you build your trapline, this coming year work towards a goal. Ultimately to have the majority of your sets be proven and the majority of your locations holding great promise of a catch is a long range development goal. Each year you will find new locations that produce and you will find some that do not. Prune and graft until you feel like all of your locations are hot spots. Develop your techniques so that you can begin to reduce the number of traps needed per location.

Sample 3 Year Plan

> "A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams."
> —John Barrymore

Your goal # of mink - 40,
By reaching the following key numbers
# of traps, - increase from 100 to 200
#of miles – increase from 50 to 160
# of locations increase from 15 to 80
% of set types
How — I will develop four sets which I rely on — blind sets at vertical edges and culverts, conitubes, coniplates and bodygripping trails/crossovers
When- I will use a stage process for covering tiers
Where- I will cover two counties and the following townships
My targeted key numbers will be 40 mink,
with a 20% success rate/trap,
One mink per four miles
One mink from every other location – 50% success rate
Average 2.5 traps per location
Using standardized equipment

Sample 5 year plan

> "Dream with your eyes open"

At this point you will find that 75% of your locations will be key (proven) and 25% should be considered Research and Development.

You are working towards not only proven locations but proven sets at these locations. Here you have had four seasons to find what works and what doesn't. In your one year and three year plans you were setting as many traps as possible at locations trying to find what you were good at. Now you know and you are taking the next step towards greatness and this means setting fewer traps at each location and reaching more locations.

Your goal 100# of mink,
By reaching the following key numbers
# of traps, - 500

# of miles – 200 from three loops
# of locations 125 to 163
% of set types 50% blind, 10% conitubes, 10% coniplates, 10% trails, 10% bottom edge, pockets, other
How — I will develop four sets which I rely on – blind sets at vertical edges and culverts, conitubes, coniplates and bodygripping trails/ crossovers and I will master the use of others to be employed whenever needed.
When — I will use a staged setting process for covering tiers
Where — I will cover four counties and the following townships
My targeted key numbers will be 100 mink,
with a 20% success rate /trap,
1 mink per 2 miles
1 mink from eight out of 10 locations set = an 80% success rate
500 traps in 125 locations = Average four traps per location or preferably 163 locations with three traps.
Using standardized equipment, with all locations close to the road, 36 hour check strategy.

Developing the Strategy

Strategies are a plan to action

> "Columbus didn't just sail, he sailed west."
> — Golightly

Lets determine the length of the season and the number of days we will be trapping. For example in your area you may have access to transportation which will get you to ___major water sheds with each having, ___ tributaries, the total length of your line is____ in miles and you have____ hours per day to work the line after getting set up.
Total days = DAYS during the season
To further break this down lets analyze the number of locations we can maintain during each month are as follows
days X avg number of stops
days x avg number of stops
day x avg number of stops
I plan on catching 45% of the seasons catch in November
I plan on catching 35 % of the seasons catch in December
I plan on catching 25 % of the season's catch in January
And with this type of math I will have an extra 5% area for miscalculation.
So we know that in___ days in____ we need to have_____ prime locations
and at those locations we will set on average___-.
To reach our goals we need to maintain those _____
To accomplish I must_____
By_____

This is how_____
This is when_____
This is where_____

Determine in what areas you have competition and where the heaviest concentration is found. Assess the level of competition and the focus of the competition and set accordingly.

On the first day it is usually prudent to set only the minimum number of traps needed to secure the location. Use fast sets and set the rest once the line is completely extended.

I tell my kids they don't have to be the best at everything — they just have to be the best at something.

Finding and Identifying Locations

Locations, Locations, Locations. First things first is a good motto for increasing your rate of success. Nothing should come any higher in importance than location. Mink trappers can spend a lot of time preparing

Here are two pictures of the same location — many trappers prospect at the wrong time of the year.

equipment, learning new sets and working on traps. However, by going for rides and searching for new locations and new routes a trapper can easily impact the coming year's production. Focus on finding links and connecting your hot spots. Look for destinations the mink may be headed for in their search for food or love. In short, you need to follow the real estate rule of thumb and apply it to mink trapping. What would a mink look for if buying real estate? Your results will be in direct proportion to the quality of your locations.

Watersheds

A watershed is the land area that drains into a stream, lake, or other body of water. The significance of a watershed when analyzed gives me a glimpse into the probability that a mink population exists. The larger the area drained the larger the probability that mink are present if habitat is also present. Knowing what attractive features are in the area is helpful in understanding population numbers and patterns. For an example if a flow of water coming from swamp land joins with a fish hatchery discharge and you can set up a bridge below both features you may have a hot spot even though the watershed at that point only covers 50 acres. Whereas a watershed of 200 acres of featureless pastureland with a stream running under a bridge may not be as productive. Watersheds hold and attract mink populations and therefore are a key component in a trapline plan.

Swamps create a habitat which supports a variety of life.

Right: Identify larger bodies of water and work backwards to see where it all comes from.

Mapping Resources

Both printed and internet resources can aid a trapper in the planning stages.

Having a preseason plan is the key to finding locations. I can't find any resource that is more valuable than an evening of driving around and taking back roads with a potential route and alternatives in hand. This is a year long or life long process of research and line development. Perhaps a lot of effort for a cheap mink pelt but for me the journey is as much fun as the destination. Your post season is a good time to use maps as everything is much easier to see with snow on the ground or at least a lack of vegetation.

From the time I started trapping in the early 1970's to now resources have changed dramatically with regards to available maps. Then I used old road maps which originated from gas stations and now the computer can service most of our needs. Start with your point of origin and work out using a site such as mapquest or google maps. I personally use google planimeter to determine distances and this is an unbelievable resource.

Google maps even has a small guy like icon which can give you unbelievable satellite imaging but this isn't available for all parts of the earth yet.

Look at an area overview and begin to zoom in. You will notice an option which tell you the amount of traffic each road encounters. These maps give you the ability to switch from general road maps to terrain to satellite images. At 20 miles you can see major water sheds and drainages and when you zoom into two miles you see how the water sheds and terrain interact. At one mile major streams and ponds can be identified and at between 2,000, 1,000 and 500 feet you will see small streams and where they cross under roads. Begin your exploration on these sites and mark known locations and possible routes. Resources in print can be as simple as an old highway map which shows streams and secondary roads. Find maps which show you watershed boundaries — primary and secondary boundaries, populations of towns, and elevations in feet above sea level.

Sources will include the army corps of engineers, game commission, fish commission, dept of forests and waters, state geological surveys, soil survey maps, the US Dept of the Interior, the Dept of Environmental Re-

sources and private companies such as Delorme which has each state's topographic maps.

Topographic and Geologic survey maps are very helpful. By using Quadrangle maps at 7.5 minute series and topo maps with 20' contour intervals a trapper can see roads which are classified primary, secondary, light duty and unimproved.

County plat books are very helpful in identifying land owners and one day using the county courthouse can provide you with addresses of absentee owners.

Once you have the name and address visit, write or call. Visiting is preferred, calling is next and writing is my last resort. Reverse directories, and caller assistance can be helpful. On the internet you can find aerial maps.

I also recommend purchasing a handheld GPS mapping device with features which include a satellite page, map page, trip page and compass page.

The satellite page acts as the gps which allows you to mark current locations.

The map page allows you to measure distance between locations.

With the compass you can mark routes. Other features too numerous to explain include the ability to use topo and road maps, view hunt and fish page, sun and moon page.

As technology advances provide more resources the trapper must not lose site of the fact that we must still deal with people and having a plan to find new locations and gain permission to trap should be a pre-season priority.

Gaining Ground and Water

The friends you make along the trapline can be as rewarding as the fur you catch. As a full time real estate broker, I've been rewarded with a lot of business as a result of seeking trapping permission and maintaining relationships. Smile, make a good impression and give something as a thank you — are three simple rules I try to follow when engaging landowners.

You can also have landowners come to you by advertising for free muskrat control services in your area. Classified ads in the paper or simpler notes on bulletin boards will work. Let friends know of your interest in helping those with ponds and promote word of mouth.

Some responses you receive will be for locations which are out of your way and if you can't help those folks refer them to your network of friends. Your friends should appreciate your help.

The ad I used follows:

Muskrat Problems?
Free removal in season
Call Don 814 938-3031

Let the game commission know you are looking for areas to trap and help them with complaints. They usually appreciate you helping them help others.

No Trespassing Sign

The best results you can expect will come from you going directly to the landowner and asking for permission. I find that there is often a welcome attitude behind the no trespassing sign. In my area many of the landowners post for the purpose of keeping their deer hunting spots under limited use. Thus, the conventional posted signs are used which clearly state no trapping. This deters some competition and can actually help a trapper who is bold enough to see beyond the poster and ask in a decent manner.

Posted — mean's "maybe" if you ask.

I typically try to in the preseason approach the owner when I am clean and suitably dressed. I like to have a clean vehicle. I provide them with a business card, refrigerator magnet or hat from my business.

In gaining ground you may just find you gain some good friends.

Area Penetration

Getting started in a new area can present challenges. Just getting your proverbial foot in the door can be difficult. Some will feel better talking to you inside and others outside. Go with whatever they feel comfortable with. Talk with the man or woman in charge. You can offend others if you bypass a son working in the yard. Best to let him know too why you are stopping. The first obstacle to overcome is a trust factor when gaining permission. This is the point at which the first impression will make or break you. Be polite and get to the point so they don't wonder for long what you want.

An objection to overcome may be presented as Joe Someone trapped on me in the past. I may say oh did he plan on trapping on you again this year? The responses are limited to yes, or I don't know. From which I may say oh that's great where did he usually trap? Do you know if he caught anything?

The responses I hope for are he trapped up the hollow and he caught coon and fox. Or even he trapped muskrats up in my pond. Ask did he trap the entire season? And go forward with getting to would you mind if I'd stay out of his way or trap after I notice he is finished. I'd also stay down by the bridge and just try for muskrats and hopefully a mink or coon. Would that be okay?

Then If you run a preseason scouting run and notice someone else is down by the bridge or culvert just move on. But let the landowner know

you appreciated the chance but being true to your word you chose not to interfere with someone else's location. This may be the local neighbor boy checking on foot or a veteran that has been there all of his life.

Remember there are plenty of other options you may just have to be patient. Review the location at times to see if you notice activity- if not then move in as you had discussed with the landowner. This courtesy will lead to a long term relationship.

Area Maintenance

Just as you are out looking to extend your line so may be others. Thus, once you have developed a loop it is important that you stay in touch with the landowners to say thanks and let them know you'd like to come back. As soon as you take the location and landowner for granted you stand to lose your spot in the pecking order.

Area Expansion

Referrals are a good way to expand your line. Be bold enough to ask if they know of any other good locations or people with need of an ethical trapper. Many farmers know of other farmers having muskrat and raccoon problems. They may even have another pond on another farm or the back 40 (acres). Expansion is the key to finding better locations. Pruning old non productive locations and adding better is a good way to keep increasing your catch totals.

This concept is important because it will take you to new populations which you are not presently serving.

At Capacity

Don't take on more than you can handle. I see that it is easier to add than remove locations you become accustomed to trapping. Once you have reached a point of carrying capacity you must stop adding unless you can eliminate other locations. At capacity is a great point to reach because your concern switches from getting enough to getting better. This is what you have worked hard to reach and now you are focused on optimizing your line.

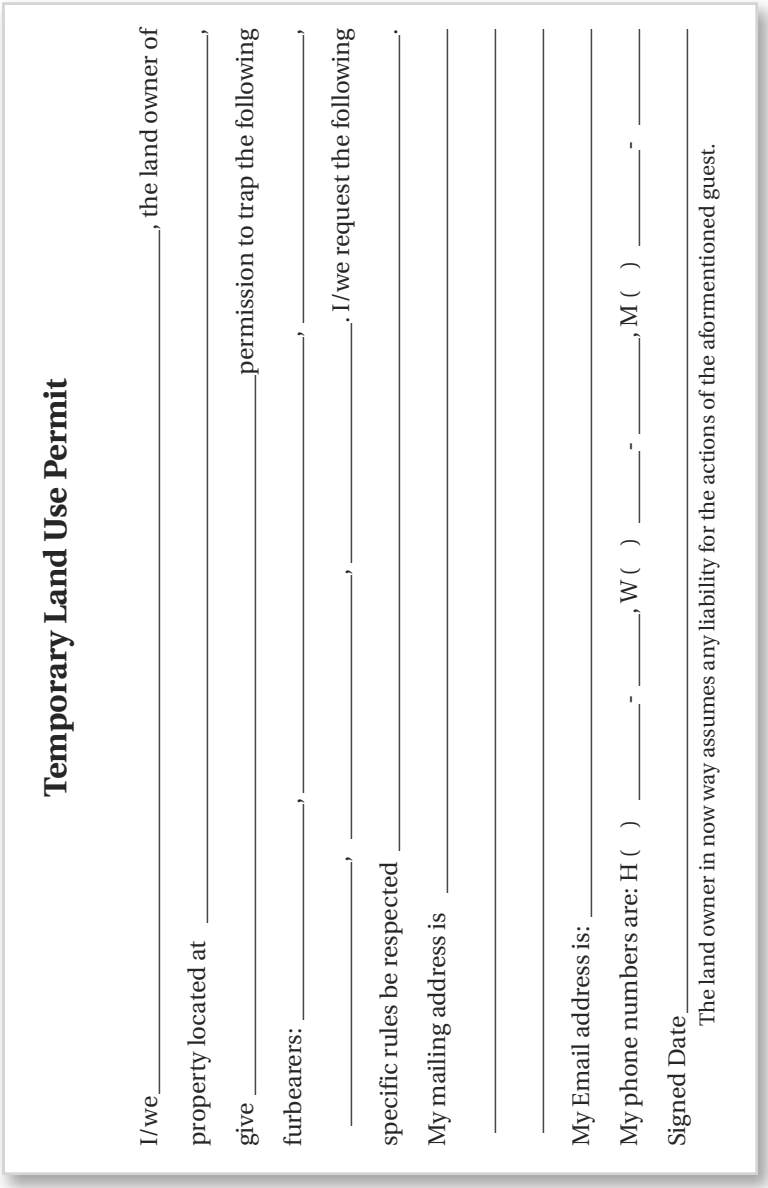
Public Relations

Like it or not you have become an important part of the trapping fraternity. You are now the person people associate with trapping. If you present a good public image our entire membership benefits. If you don't check your traps, if you don't follow the game laws, if you spin up fields, don't shut gates, throw garbage out or even walk by someone elses mcdonalds cup or pepsi can then we all suffer. Be grateful to the landowner because he/she does not owe it to us to share their land. Think if they were to ask you for permission to use your back yard for their hobby what would you say? I use this thought process when people ask if they can hunt on me? I'm often tempted to say no but then reflect on all of the people who have shared with me. Limitations can be requested but providing an area or option of cooperation is important.

Permission versus Forgiveness

A case for both could be made but I fall in the permission corner although this is definitely the most labor intensive approach.

I approach landowners by knocking on their doors. I will typically ask if they would mind if I'd try to catch some muskrats down under the road right of way. If this is okay I'll go further and ask would it hurt if I'd get a little off the right of way. Have you seen any muskrats, coon or mink in the past?



Temporary Land Use Permit

I/we _____, the land owner of

property located at _____,

give _____permission to trap the following

furbearers: _____, _____, _____,

_____, _____, _____. I/we request the following

specific rules be respected _____.

My mailing address is _____

_____

_____

My Email address is: _____

My phone numbers are: H ( ) _____-_____, W ( ) _____-_____, M ( ) _____-_____

Signed Date _____

The land owner in now way assumes any liability for the actions of the aformentioned guest.

Thanks for Everything and Nothing

Whether you catch anything or not – give thanks for the ability and opportunity –Thank God and those who allow it to happen, — Your family, The landowners and their families.

Reauthorization

I like to touch base every year to make sure the landowner knows I'm coming back if allowed.

Temporary Land Use Permit

I/we _____*Joe Land Owner*_____, the land owner of property located at _____*101 Landowner Drive, Any City, State 12345*_____, give _____*Your Name*_____ permission to trap the following furbearers: _____*muskrats*_____, _____*coon*_____, _____*mink*_____, _____*anything legal*_____. I/we request the following specific rules be respected _____*don't trap near barn, don't drive on fields*_____. My mailing address is _____*Your Address, Any City, State 12345*_____

_____

_____

My Email address is: _____*my email address@yahoo.com*_____

My phone numbers are: H ( ) _____*(123) 555-7890*_____, W ( ) _____-_____, M ( ) _____-_____

Signed Date _____*My Signature*_____

The land owner in no way assumes any liability for the actions of the aformentioned guest.

Location Analysis

When attending a stock trading course which dealt with technical analysis green arrows were used to indicate positive indicators. The same concept can be used to identify hotspots.

In analyzing the value of your locations, look first at the neighborhood and then at the stop and its improvements.

The neighborhood so to speak is what we will call the big picture. As you work through the steps in your analysis you will determine if the area is one that is under served, and your final decision will be whether you choose to attempt to cover this area.

For businesses the macro location analysis is the first step in identifying opportunity. Anywhere anyone relies on populations for success location becomes important.

This concept is true if you are playing monopoly, building a casino, developing a convenience store or about to plan a trapline.

So in what neighborhood would we want to set up a mink stop?
Things to look for follow:

Relevance of the waterway

Where does the water come from and where does it go?

Surroundings

Is this an area where you could expect to find rabbits? swamps, overgrown fields, – wherever there is a probability of food combined with habitat

Destinations

What types of attractions could draw mink? ponds, beginning of water shed drainages, mouths of waterways, beaver dam, poultry farm, fish hatchery

Connectors

Paths to those destinations what types of travel will the mink encounter? Long uninterrupted slow moving streams with brushy banks or long barren pasture fields with no overhead cover and fast moving rocky streams?

General stream type

Does the stream look like you could catch a muskrat there?

So for the general streams appeal I ask if this is an area where a mink would travel through and feel safe doing it. Is there somewhere he may be interested in getting to and did he come from somewhere interesting? Is there a probable population?

Ease of access

Easiest is not always the best

TROUBLE SIGNS

The presence of competitors is often obvious. Perhaps rock cubbies, wire attached to roots or other drags.

Dog or cat tracks. Kid tracks. Adult tracks,

Raw sewage etc.

The Small Picture in the Bigger Picture

You've determined that the area is minky now you are deciding on what the stop looks like.

When you pull over-are you close to the road? are you at a bridge? You are looking for roots, obstructions, funnels, vertical edges, piles of drift, pools with minnows, overhangs, culverts, rip rap,.

When you peer down over you see where rabbits chewed the bark of some small trees, a grain field is still standing only 50 yards from the far bank, you see very good wing walls, corners, you can easily walk to the bridge from a place to pull off the road, no houses are present and there is a string hanging from the bridge into the water and attached is a minnow trap loaded with chubs, crayfish and a water snake. On top of that there isn't a clear way to the bottom and it doesn't look like a trail exists which tells me I may not have much competition here but with some work I can get down to the waist high water. I can see coon and mink tracks in a cleared area along the bank. Muskrat scat is present on a protruding log. You'd better mark this down as a possibility and see if you can get permission.

If a mink were going to live somewhere what what would he look for. I'd say Mr. Mink would prefer a nice living room, a bedroom, a dining room, a playground, swimming pool, pantry, refrigerator, seclusion and few enemies. A place for easy travel to and from where he wants to go.

When you come back — you'll ask where is the kitchen? if a mink were to go to the buffet which is set out here where would he set down to eat. Where would his dining room be? If he caught a big old chub he'd not eat it in the open along the bank. No he may seek the shelter of the undercut bank, or the slab of concrete from the old bridge, or a high bank hole, or under the roots of the old maple tree. How about the bedroom?

Is there a playground near (created by a beaver dam)

If a mink were passing through where would he travel? What are his options, over, under, or around?

What prey is present? Look for muskrats, rabbits, minnows, trout, fish, mice

We have to identify territory, select locations and gain permission,- the rest will come.

Quality of water I used to think was important. Now I know that some poor water with iron or sulphur can produce productive locations. Undercut banks require close examination these are good locations for pockets or trail sets.

To you the picture is now pretty clear. You have identified the area as minky and now have a good idea that this stop will either be under consideration for a potential stop on your trap line or be scratched off your list since another stop above or below looks better.

Sifting

We've found a lot of locations but we've decided we only want so many on a given stream – for me not more than two even if they are 10 miles apart.

Now we have to start the sifting process.

Analyze with a green arrow or crayon ones that have positive attributes, red arrow ones that are less desirable if you get more than ½ green keep it as good, more than ¾ keep it as hot. Some attributes will be knockout factors.

1. permission- yes or no (knockout factor)
2. pets — Pet exposure — are there barking dogs — for me this is a knock out since at 2 am I won't gain friends when the family dog wakes up the entire neighborhood.

I can make sets that won't catch pets but I can't prevent barking.

3. parking — close safe, far
4. population — are there mink present, unknown?
5. proven — Proven location or unproductive in the past
6. big water — prone to flood, or a small drainage
7. traffic — can I pull off and get to the location without being run over. Picture of tractor trailer
8. neighbors — Proximity to houses – will someone always be watching you
9. convenient — connector am I going by anyways or off the beaten path
10. competition — theft
11. ease of access to sets
12. outstanding features
13. set suitability
14. safety — deep water — over my head, swift

So Phase One asks — How is the curb appeal? are the surroundings minky?, without homes?, easy access?, easy parking ?

Phase Two asks — How does this location compare with the alternative options?

Pruning (Cutting the dead wood)

Addition by subtraction — Each year you should not only add but delete locations which hold no promise or have too high of a cost on your energy expense for the productivity returned. Pruning is essential for the good of the trapline. The energy which is spent on nonproductive locations can be used to establish a potential hot spot.- if for all your efforts the location is just not helping you reach your goal then prune this stop. Perhaps theft is prevalent. Pets, dogs, cats, ducks are near. Access is difficult. Parking is dangerous. Permission is lost. The location is inconvenient for linkage, hard, time consuming or dangerous to check. I have favorite locations and I'm sure mink are the same way. I like road trapping but making the mink come to a place that is not a naturally traveled location can be difficult.

Prune your line by using a black marker.

Be careful before you snip locations though as I must admit I've had locations which were not productive for a couple years. The problem was not the location but my techniques. This past year one such location produced 3 mink. My analysis of the location showed that there should be mink present so I didn't give up on the location but adjusted my techniques. I'm quick to set, slow to cut if I believe the location looks minky-perhaps the travel patterns are misunderstood — if water fluctuations are problematic then I may need to consider other options.

Pruning inefficient routes locations and sets is a practice which will keep your trap line alive and producing.

Once you prune you should consider grafting another location to your line. I define grafting as the act of adding to your existing line a viable part.

Branching if you can check some traps on the way into work how about another line for on the way home?

Key Locations - Your Prized Possessions

These stops have a high probability of producing from year to year. Keep track of your production. Once a location has connected color

Key locations are the foundation of your line.

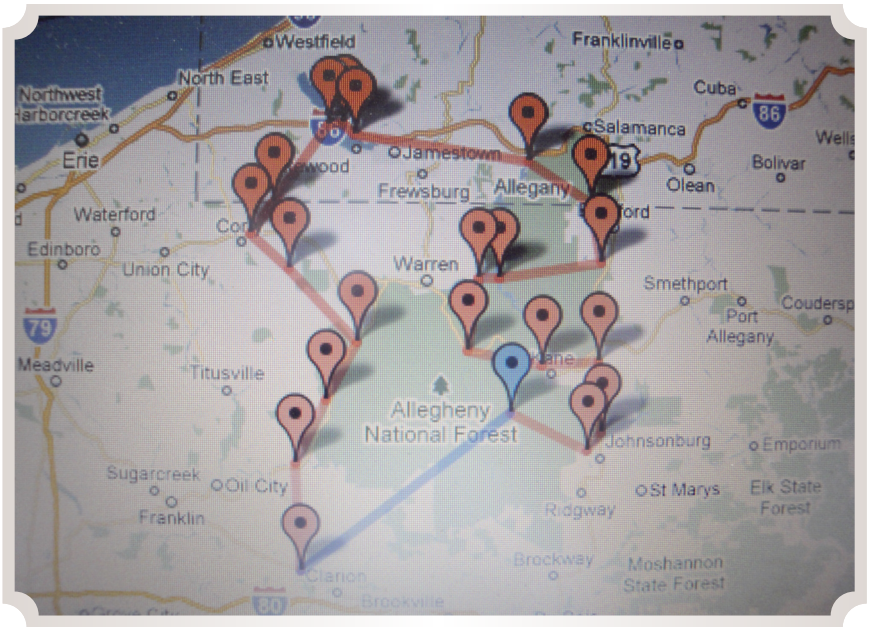
this spot on your papers forever a success. Each year you'll gain more productive sets and at a point three years, five years or 10 years down the road you'll have a line with colored locations indicating past successes and your confidence will be high. Persistence is the key.

These key locations will ultimately be the foundation of your entire line. In the winter — drive and look for tracks. You can see the terrain better and by spring you can note on your maps locations which seem promising. Study aerials aided by topos to see how each location looks from the point of continuation up and down stream.

From each component identify your key locations and develop options with each alternative. Some change will occur each year and you will lose permission at one place or development will reduce the appeal of another. Each year you are finding more key locations than you are losing. The building of a good trapline is not a quick or easy process. Still once you have a trap line that produces year after year you will become as attached to it as you would your prized coon hound. Really they are no different in many respects because both must be cared for and both can easily be lost.

Location Plotting

Now that you've identified and selected prime locations you need to start putting them together. Try using Google planimeter or take a map and highlight each stop, give it a name and identify which stream and watershed of which it is a part. Once you have all your locations plotted look



Google Planimeter allows you to plot your stops as illustrated by this "made up sample trapline".

for large gaps, uncovered streams and duplicate stream coverages. If more locations are needed get back to work gaining ground and water. Note the best locations which you want to use as a part of your line's foundation. Then rank other good locations, fair locations and okay locations.

Concentrated Clusters are a bonus that happens when you can find several suitable stops from different drainages and different streams close together. These concentrated finds are not uncommon but you have to be careful that you are exposing your traps to different mink populations.

Time and measure your trapline and map your check points or stops. This can be eye opening. Do your own time study by traveling different directions and using alternative routes. Again a computer and internet based maps such as google planimeter will help you measure distances.

Path Intelligence-Logistics

A fluid check strategy is needed to save time. Fast in and fast out needs to be accomplished at each location. I've been amazed over the years at how I've found easier ways to access areas on my trapline by taking different routes to and from my sets. Going down one side or starting at a different end and going up a different way often makes a difference. When you run your line in the preseason take pruning shears and heavy gloves and snip off briars. Throw old logs which can trip you out of the way. Look for broken bottles, pieces of metal and wires that can cut your boots. Plan or create a path but know that you may also be creating a path for your competition. Solve the puzzles created by steep banks in the preseason by cutting steps into the stream bank for foot holds. Difficult vertical structure is usually no problem once steps are made or hand gripping

There was no easy way in/out of this location until pre-season work made access possible.

aids are put in place. Rope tied to a tree up on the bank can assist with your return to the vehicle. Efforts to make hard to reach spots feasible can turn nearly impossible locations to trap into viable locations.

Line Design and Configurations

Once you have decided how much time you have to check and set traps and you know your starting point, it is time to identify your locations and coordinate your check strategy with your route of travel.

A vector type line has no return but may be an all day affair where the trapper must take enough equipment and possibly dead head home. The problem with this configuration is that backtracking may be necessary. However, this can allow you to gain distance from your starting point perhaps getting into better territory. Trappers who choose a vector type line may want to trap in the daylight but may not mind driving home in darkness. You could have two camps and run separate lines to and from each but then equipment is not centralized.

A loop is a route which goes out and comes back.

The dimensions of your line can vary to allow checking in stages. Components are a part of a loop which may be either fixed or under consideration for replacement with another alternative route.

Alternative routes are components of your loop which you can check at different stages as long as you stay within your states check requirements. Your loop may have more than one area in which checking good locations will require backtracking. With a 36 hour requirement to check you could choose to check the main portion of your line every 24 hours and check alternating routes within the 36 hours. These alternate locations should be set up to insure dead animals and the sets used should be mink specific. In these locations I would use my coniboxes, coniplates and conibears along trails within the watercourse. No legholds would be used even though I could use drowning wires and rods because unanticipated malfunction caused by debris can prevent the sure drowning.

You may have a line with 3 legs. The first can go from your home to work, the second from work to home and the third from home to work again.

So dimensions may include what I call

Simple single loop — from home to home in one continuous run. In this design you are going away from your home or base for ½ the route. You need to take enough traps and equipment for the entire line from the beginning of the check until the end.

Double — loops from home to home can be checked at alternating times or these loops can be checked continuously but the design brings you back to your base/home or shop so that you can drop catches off, pick up needed equipment and when pulling you can unload and continue on. The advantage of this is that one loop can be checked in the morning before work and the other after. On days when both loops can be run without interruption then there is still an advantage since bathroom breaks, lunch or dinner may be enjoyed at home.

Clover leaf — three loops all coming back to your base camp, home or

shed provide all the advantages mentioned in the double loop. This configuration lends itself to broken checks – loop 1 in the morning, loop two at night, and loop three the next morning – loop one, is then checked the next night loop two, the following morning and loop three the following evening. This method also allows continuous checking of two loops or all three at once. I enjoy hunting with my family and on the first day of deer season I can knock out one loop before daylight and the other two after dark. Flexibility to incorporate trapping into your life along with family, work and other priorities is the appeal of this configuration.

A moving line

Here we would plan on trapping heavily for a short period of time and taking the cream from the areas which we setup. We attempt to take as many furbearers possible in the time period. As we then pull traps on one end we can set another area on the other. Or we can pull all and then set all new. When coon trapping I prefer this method to keep my numbers up and to always have my traps in front of fresh populations. You could end up behind other trappers and for mink patience and persistence are important.

A fixed line has placed traps which are typically left in place but adjusted when needed.

Split lines have more than one route.

Mixed lines target more than one furbearer and there is nothing wrong with variety.

Long line is usually a full time effort covering an extended distance

Fast line is an effort to catch animals without a great expenditure of time — usually easily checked and with traps close to the line of travel

Complete line — a state of satisfaction regarding your planned setup of locations and sets

Partial line — an incomplete portion of your total planned line

Dry line — sets designed to stay in operation no matter the water level but set on ground not covered by water

Wet line — sets designed to stay in operation no matter the water level but set in the water at greater depth than those along the edge

Edge line — a series of sets just under the water surface along the banks or vertical edges

Road line — as it applys to mink trapping- a series of stops focusing on bridges, culverts and water close to roads.

Maintained line — any type of sets in a series regardless of length of the line that is checked, adjusted and cared for enough that all are in operation and capable of producing targeted catches

Neglected line — a series of sets which may or may not be being checked and adjusted, some may be in operation but some are not likely to be capable of catching the targeted animal – this is like feeding a dead pig since effort is still required to check but no return is probable.

Producing line — a series of sets that are in place, given attention and are resulting in furbearers.

Potential line — a series of locations with sets that could be put into service given time and effort.

Spot trapping — in and out quick with no more walking than is necessary.

I try to incorporate a clover leaf design and trap spots along a road line. I keep my sets maintained and producing and although I do not trap full time I give full time effort so I consider myself a long liner.

Mechanical Advantage

Mechanical Advantage is the factor by which a mechanism multiplies the force applied to it. And the formula says that mechanical advantage is the distance over which effort is applied divided by the distance over which the load is moved. Simply the advantage is equal to the output force/the input force.

Advantage is gained when your ratio is positive as it relates to how much you get out versus how much you put in. This principal can be applied to a trapline as follows:

The MAGIC of LEVERAGE
Work

		Effort
	Traps	Time
Mink	Locations	~
	Plan^	

The LEVER is the tools and resources we use to accomplish our goal. In our case it is the quantity and quality of our traps, tools, accessories and locations employed in pursuit of mink.

The Force applied to the lever is one of the key components in the leverage principle. This force used to push the lever itself is multiplied based upon the positioning of the fulcrum. In our example the time, effort and work applied to the lever will be a factor in what we accomplish.

In coaching softball I learned an eye opening principle that can be applied to anyone's trap line analysis. The saying that "you can't coach effort" is very true. And in our discussion if a person doesn't make the effort and take the time to work the lever will not accomplish any significant movement.

The Fulcrum

A Solid Plan – to do much of the simple, all of the needed, none of the inefficient will create a contact point which will make a pivotal difference. And as the years go on and we become wiser, develop insight into our numbers, and perfect our techniques within our systems we can push the fulcrum closer to our goals which will decrease the needed force to reach the goal.

The fulcrum is the underlying point of emphasis. This is what puts the magic in the leverage principle.

The magic formula – take a modified mink trap and multiply it by as many locations as possible and divide these traps into a diversified group of sets and add knowledge of the mink's habits plus enticing set designs

and subtract all excuses and all self pity then apply an exponential of your effort and work and this will equal your desired goal for mink caught.

Avoid Lateral Drift where you are not really growing in your pursuit.

As with a plane taking off most of the fuel burned happens on the runway.

Ask at which speed is there more danger? 50 mph or 650 mph

The answer is it depends if you are in an airplane or a car. You are safer at 650 mph in an airplane than you are at 50 mph.

Mink trapping is the same way. We are better off going fast than we are going slow.

Actively plan and evaluate situations, weapons, objectives and tactics.

Have clear goals

Have a preseason plan and conduct trials. When trying new techniques use caution in analyzing sample size. I say this because I have talked with others who have tried on a small scale some of the techniques that work very well for me. I believe they did not expose their methods over an entire line to experience the same success. Again, when mink trapping understand you will strike out a great percentage of the time. Can you keep trying or will you give up? Learn to celebrate your attempts and become great at trying.

Force yourself to increase the time you spend attempting to gain permission and locations.

Focus on avoiding the temptation to complicate any part of your trapline. Make productive sets you can check and maintain. It is easier to set traps than it is to check and maintain a trap line. Lateral drift occurs when trappers have no real plan but we also need to be careful to build at a sustainable pace because even a heap of garbage can grow in size.

Mink Traps

"Without good soldiers the battle will not be won"

For mink I believe in a leghold trap heavy enough to drown the mink, fast enough to catch it, with a pan so big they'll rarely miss stepping on it. I prefer a trap modified enough to avoid broken legs, with a jaw spread wide enough to produce a high hold, capable of holding the occasional coon, easy to bed, and very affordable. The number two victor or blake and lamb is what I prefer. I still use #1½ s and #11's which are capable mink catchers but don't do as well in my opinion. New traps are fine if you can afford them but starting out and investing at today's prices is tough especially if you decide you need hundreds of traps.

I have mink traps, coyote traps, coon traps, fox traps, muskrat traps, and they are all different. My mink traps are not even close to looking like my raccoon traps. In my area however my mink traps will encounter raccoon and I'd like to hold the incidental muskrat and raccoon.

Since I start trapping raccoon 1-2 weeks before mink season on a part of my line I hope to have some of the incidentals skinned and stretched before a mink trap is set.

The complement to my legholds are my bodygrippers. I utilize various brands of the #110 and #160 bodygrippers.

You should pick a favorite and accumulate that favorite.

Use what you have available or if those traps are not sufficient sale them and buy quality.

While the trap model is not required to be the same the attachment hardware should be uniform.

Separation of differing models is also critical to expedite setting. The older square jaw conibears fit on certain stabilizers better than others and a #2 victor has advantages over some other legholds.

I like the wide jaw spread which means I can have a big pan. The #2 can also be adjusted to carry the increased pan weight.

The #2 victor has been described as a poor coon trap but I find them more than capable when the springs are strong and when properly anchored. I hold a high percentage of raccoon although my intentions are usually not to catch them.

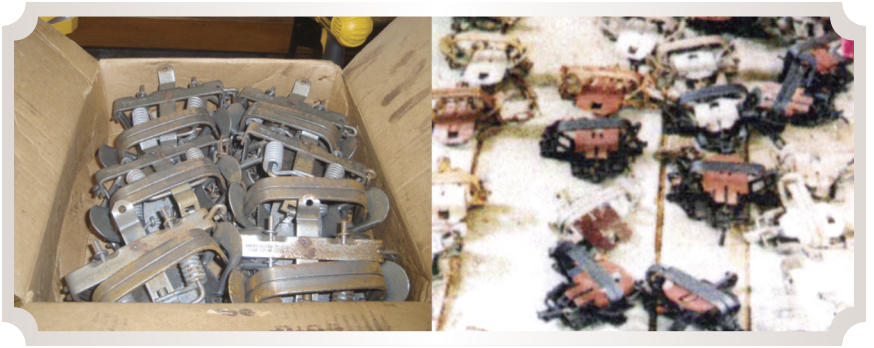
In current the #2s r'eally shines because they have a low profile and enough weight to resist being washed away. Muskrats and mink can be quickly drowned with the #2 and the high hold these traps take is good.

When I buy new I would consider what incidentals may come along but never lose sight of what trap is best for your targeted species. If you will concentrate on coon also then consider the #11's long springs and the #1½'s of any of the brands.

Body grippers vs. legholds is a debated issue which I don't believe has an either or answer. I find a mink trapper should learn to use both tools just as a carpenter needs a saw and hammer.

Accumulating traps

"Providence favors those with the most resources"
—Napoleon



Traps are the tools of your trade. When mink trapping with simple sets a trapper is wise to cover a lot of locations and place as many traps as can possibly be tended. Therefore, to catch a large number of mink a trapper needs to have a quantity of traps. While a trapper just starting out should consider their financial abilities and not purchase more than they can afford, a plan can be put in to place to add as opportunities present themselves.

Trap accumulation can be an enjoyable hobby. Just talking to those you meet at work or socially can lead to opportunities. Asking others if they've ever trapped can open doors. If they no longer trap ask if they have, or know of, any traps for sale. Some great buys are possible on traps laying dormant in a basement or garage. Ads in local papers can also be fruitful. An advertisement I use follows:

Newspaper ad
Paying Cash for
Used muskrat /fox traps
(816) 123-0000

In negotiating with sellers I like to let them tell me what price they want as many are what I call "don't wanter's" who will almost give them away. If they tell you a price higher than you wish to pay simply say "thanks anyway the price is just more than I can pay at this time. I may have a chance to buy others which are more affordable. Is it okay if I call you back if that doesn't happen?"

While I like the #2 victor and blake and lambs.

Other brands are great traps. I suggest you pick 1 brand and accumulate them and their parts

You can increase your inventory at conventions as you will often find good deals if you get there early and talk to the vendors. On the last day

near the end many dealers will negotiate because they don't want to take any more than necessary home with them.

Trading is another option if you find a great deal on types or brands you know a buddy uses buy them for him with the understanding you can trade. He may just return the favor when he runs across your brand and favorites.

Tags

The top tag on the right came from traps I purchased and NO information was readable. Bottome is imprinted and a more legible option.

Check your game laws and be sure you have current information. For a small investment imprinted durable copper tags can't be beat. Attachment clips come in the form of a "c" and these make connecting to the trap simple and a little more permanent than a thin piece of wire.

The information you put on the tag should be complete. In Pennsylvania, at the time of this writing, you can apply for a number which the game commission has on file. When problems occur the general population can only find out who you are by calling the game commission. I suppose there are some advantages to this but I'm not sure what they are. If someone finds my trap, or steals my trap I want them to know it is mine. If I catch a pet I'm willing to take responsibility and defuse the feelings of hostility if they exist. The reason this works for me is that I almost always have permission to be where I am trapping. I'm proud of what I do and don't mind anyone knowing who I am. Even though I have permission land owners may not realize that it's me. If they've seen signs of my coming and goings and they check the trap and see my name all should be well. I get my tags from vendors at the conventions and through my catalogs. Be careful when ordering and make sure your information is correct. You can get quantity discounts but I don't order too many more than I need at the time because phone numbers and addresses have a tendency to change.

Marking your Traps

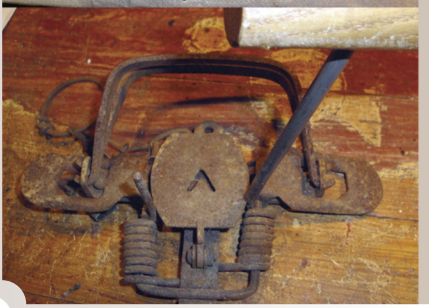
If your traps are stole, personalized markings can help indentify them and prove your ownership.

All of my traps are permanently marked with a system I can use to identify my ownership of the trap. Use your imagination and mark your traps with a unique marking. Let your local warden know of your mark in the event he runs across stolen traps. I've been able to retrieve a few traps this way.

Remember if you are selling traps, remove your tags.

Modifications to the #2 Victor

Here a #2 Victor has the springs removed and new one's ready to be installed — as well as a Mink Pan and Universal Swivel.



A tool for releasing spring tension is worth the investment.

Replacing the springs on a #2 coilspring

You can't teach speed and if you are going to go to the effort of running a trapline you may as well be rewarded with catches.

I modify my #2 victor traps by adding swivels and mink pans. My traps must be lightning fast and capable of firing as soon as the mink touches the pan.

To begin with decide if the springs need replaced by comparing the strength of newer traps to the subject trap under review. A plastic pop bottle test is another way to test fire the trap. I don't recommend dry firing any more than is necessary so I take a small plastic pop bottle and squeeze some of the air out and then put on the lid. Next fire the trap by pushing down on the pan and pulling up on the bottle. You will notice a difference in the strength of some traps. If you decide to replace the springs the following instructions will apply to most coilsprings a mink trapper will use.

The tools needed include a screwdriver, socket or pliers, and spring replacement tool. To begin take off the pan/shank combination, place the bolt and nut in a container where it won't get lost.

Release the tension from the springs by dislodging the longer spring ends with the use of the replacement tool — do one side then the other— you may need to use the screw driver to pry the spring end up enough to get the tool over the end— careful here not to snap your fingers.

Pull out the U shaped spring pin and remove the springs.

Insert the new springs on the appropriate side (there is a left and right spring) and reverse the process to reassemble the trap.

Have another trap there to look at for spring positioning.

Step Coverage

Notice the increased size of the area a Mink Pan helps to cover.

Step Coverage is simply increased by expanding the size of the area in which the animals movement can fire the trap.

You are building a system designed to give you every opportunity to

increase your catch and the rate of success you experience. You are trying to cover more territory in miles, and more area with our tier trapping system, we also need to increase what I call step coverage.

If you don't already have a mink pan on this would be a good time to install a barker mink pan. I actually prefer to put them on while on the trap.

This step coverage concept was brought to my attention by Craig O' Gorman's use of screen pan covers for canine. As soon as I started following his lead in this area my catch increased. Upon seeing the barkers mink pans advertised I tried a pack and then immediately ordered enough for every one of my mink traps.

These thin metal sheets are manufactured in different sizes #1, #2 and can be purchased from most of the reputable dealers. I really like them since I don't have to drill, weld or alter my trap pans. Simply bend the 2 back tabs down around almost shut then slide the pan in the slots. Next bend the front tab to tighten then crimp the back tight and wrap around the existing pan. Since the installation requires bending and wrapping the metal around the pan shank only the pans attached with certain shanks accommodate these catch increasing additions. Traps like the old pinch pan 1 ½ wont work for this modification. Humberg mink pans also work to increase the size of covered area on smaller traps.

Mink pans will increase your success rate.

When installing mink pans, check to make sure the pan doesn't interfere with the jaws closing.

I believe that there is no sense in doubling our coverage in terms of miles if we are losing mink because of inches.

Next insure proper dog/ notch interaction

Channel locks and a file are usually all that are needed to bend the shank forward or back to align the pan height. Adjust your traps so that no pan creep exists File the dog to remove rounded edges and pitted or rusty surface. The pan notch should be free of wax, build up, rust or rounded surfaces. I used to night latch all of my traps but now don't worry about that as much as I do good surface contact.

Pan tension adjustment

Sensitivity analysis of each trap determines if pan tension is enough to prevent the trap from firing on its own and yet capable of firing when a mink moves it either by weight downward or sideways. Sideways movement of the pan is something I always tried to avoid but since the mink may be swimming and only brush the pan I now leave enough lateral movement or play in the mechanism to insure I catch mink that may have been missed in the past.

With my Legholds I have free drop pan tension and I have some with a night latch but all have filed actions. For trapping mink I have all of my pans and or dogs notched for hair trigger action.

Pan adjustments on # 2 victors should be at the jaw level. The #2 victor

offers speed and when it fires the jump grabs the mink above the feet so that pinched toes are not common.

With no pan tension placing the trap in water with current can cause the trap to fire. So in placing the trap in the water do so in a way that the current is not hitting the top of the pan.

Because of increased pan weight, leverage on older models may be difficult to control since tightening is difficult if a bolt is not present. Ideally you should have a screw driver file and pliers or nut socket for coilsprings which need adjusted on the line In a pinch, use leaves under the pan or other spongy materials. If needed place grass under pan to create enough resistance to prevent pan creep and firing.

Spare parts

I like the coilsprings and body grippers as they are easily repaired not a lot can go wrong.

If traps break they can be repaired by purchasing replacement parts. I have bought collections of traps which have included irreparably damaged traps. I save these in buckets and will in the offseason try to create as many working traps from the bucket as possible. In doing so I'll make a list and pick up what is needed from a catalog order or dealer at a convention.

I still own #1, #11 and #1 ½ longspring traps as well as many #1 and #1 ½ coilsprings. These are all capable of catching mink and I will on occasions use them all but I choose to in most cases use my #2 coilsprings as I feel they are the ultimate mink trap. I also use my #110 and #160 sized bodygrippers.

On the left is a #110 sized trap and on the right a #160.

Modifications to the 110 and 160 size bodygrippers

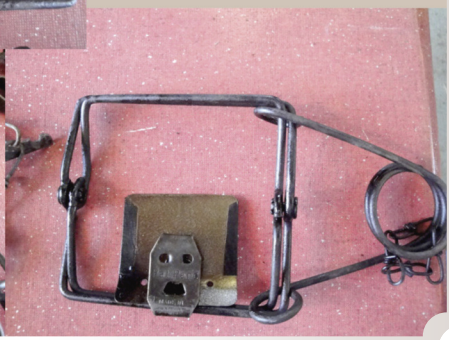
Conibears with pans or as I call them treadles — definitely have their place on the mink line. Less refusals for entry will be noticed.

Hardwood coni pans fit 160 body grip traps and no trigger wires are present to poke the animals in the face. Mink will step right on the pan.

The instructions for installation are simply remove rivot in the trigger with a 1/8 imch drill and bolt the hardwood coni pan on with the bolt provided. The pan should be on the outside bottom jaw when in the box and the pan should be facing into the box.

Home made Conibear pans can be made from lids from soup cans. Simply make four holes with a punch. two from one side and then turn the lid over and punch two more but not evenly so that threading the trigger wires is easier if one is already started — then bend the wire slightly after installed to hold the pan in place. Finally bend the wires down so the pan is at the desired level.

Another homemade option is simply drill holes in a piece of wood and thread the triggers through or take a thin piece of paneling and staple to the bent wires. The wires themselves can be configured for 110s and bent horizontally to make a trip trigger.



Conipans can come in many forms from hamemade to machined.

Starting triggers

Another breakthrough came to me from Mark Stackhouse at an Ohio State trappers association demonstration when I listened to how he starts his conibear triggers. I initially questioned the method thinking that I'd experience a lot of fired and empty traps. However, the method was a breakthrough for my 160's and 110's. I'd previously been modifying triggers with thin trip wires (a job I found to be time consuming and not enjoyable). After using Mark's suggestion I found mink going through the trap do brush against the trigger and if there is movement the trap will fire. There is no attempt to avoid slight contact. I think the fixed triggers require the mink to push and their makeup is more to avoid than push through. So now all of my conibear trigger will be started when set in trails or conitubes. I do leave them fully engaged for underwater sets

I add Swivels to the ends of all of my traps.

Treating traps

If you treat your traps you are protecting your investment. Without care the life of your traps will be rather short. Regardless of fur prices this is not something you can overlook doing on a regular basis. How and with what you treat your traps is a matter of preference. All parts of the treatment processes should be handled outside under the supervision of adults. The Equipment needed for treating traps includes hooks for hanging treated, wet traps. I have used wires strung from tree to tree, clothes lines, pipes with wire, nails on barns and boards with nails between saw

horses. My favorite is an old rack I found which was used in a service station. Keep an eye open or make your own but don't overlook the importance of a place to hang your treated traps to dry as this is a yearly ritual. To remove traps from your boiler or tank I use a bent rod off a snowmobile ski. But any type of hook which will allow you to fish for loose traps and hook them and then get them to the rack without touching them with your hands is ideal.

Cleaning Traps

Wash Tub *Lye*

The first step no matter your method is cleaning your traps. I pick each up and remove any hair, mud, grass or other debris. I cut off any wire and wire brush anything that looks like it may be tough to remove. Next I spread part of them out on an old cement pad near our barn. Then I hit them with water from a pressure washer. I'll rinse them, turn them over, and rinse some more until pretty clean and after cleaning one batch . I continue with another until they are all done.

Then I load them in a boiling tub and add Lye or saniflush, then water and then I apply heat. Extreme caution is necessary here because you are now using toxic substances which can burn your skin if contact occurs and if inhaled can burn your lungs. The boiling water is an obvious danger. Once all are completed I remove the traps and again rinse with the pressure washer. Once this step is completed the traps are ready to be boiled and dyed or dipped.

When boiling I use natural materials such as darkened hulls of walnuts (collected in the fall and stored in a plastic bucket) or bark from a hemlock tree. Purchased logwood dyes, powder and crystals also effectively penetrate the metal and deter rust. Ironically some rust on the traps helps to

get the process started. Natural colors are not a problem if you prefer to simply boil and clean.

I usually boil my legholds and conibears in the early summer months.

The Boiler I use now is heated by gas but I used to use old oil drums either cut in half when standing up or cut with an opening on the top when laying on the side.

Fire can come from wood, coal, gas or any other method which a plumbing heating specialist feels is safe.

My conibears are boiled for my own peace of mind in logwood dye. Some are spray painted to give a lighter color for trail setting. I especially prefer my Triggers to be lighter than the jaws. The darker frame actually highlights the hole and the weed color of the trigger doesn't discourage entry.

Trap Boiler

Walnuts on the tree

Waxing traps

Many people believe waxing your traps will prolong the trap's life and I agree. I used to do this religiously because wax also makes the trap faster. I don't wax my traps every year. I have tried most of the methods and believe that waxing continues to move down my list of preferred methods. As a canine trapper I have waxed my traps for years and I still feel this is appropriate. But with conibears I never wax because they become too difficult to keep set. Wax will also make legholds specifically #2 victors harder to keep set and this becomes frustrating. Since I use barker mink pans and no pan tension (free drop of the pan) the additional lubricant requires a tightening of the pan's nut and bolt to create tension.

A few years back I tried to wax only the lower portion of my legholds. I did this by using a hot plate to melt wax in a cake pan and then lowered the trap into the shallow pan. The results proved the process to be time consuming since it is necessary to allow the trap to reach the same temperature as the wax. The wax still made its way to the dog and pan. The idea was to keep the jaws free of wax which serves as lubricant for animals to escape. I've waxed traps for over 30 years but now feel there are better methods that make a finger friendlier finished product.

Dipping

The products which I use are Andy Stoe's Speed Dip, KBL Quick Dye and Formula One Instant Trap Kotes. The first two mixes requires gasoline or coleman fuel and I always follow the directions on the mix's container. The Formula One mix uses water

I used to stir the mixes with a wooden paint stirrer but now use a ¾ inch paint mixer for my 3/8 inch drill.

I really like the water mix for my snares and cable attachments.

The container you use is a matter of preference but I prefer a large metal pan which holds close to three gallons. In this way I can dip several traps at a time. I do this on a gravel driveway outside my fur shed. A stiff wire is used to attach traps and I allow the traps to set in the mix for a couple minutes before removing, shaking off excess and hanging to dry. I retrieve the traps by picking up the wire which I leave outside the container and the mix. I hang that group up and add another. When all traps are completed I put a tightly sealed lid on the container and the mix will keep until needed again.

Middle: Author's dipping trap.
Right: dip container and rack used for drying

Dirty Traps

When my dryland sets make a catch I consider the trap to be dirty and I will separate these traps from my other traps which are clean. In conitubes and coniboxes I feel my rate of continued catches increases with a new trap and movement of the entire set away from the previous site. When a catch is made I move the set at least a couple feet from the previous site. If the catch was made in a #160 I leave the coon in the original trap and put trap and catch in the truck. I replace the old trap with a clean one and move on. At the end of the day I unload the catches and the ones still in a #160 are taken to my workshop/ shed area where the vice holds a set of tongs by 1 lever. This way I can use 1 hand to operate the tongs and latch the safety hooks and the other hand positions the trap to put the tongs in the spring eyes and remove the animal. In this way I don't delay at the site and can easily use the tongs to remove the catch.

Middle: Author's dipping trap.
Right: dip container and rack used for drying

Storing Traps and Equipment

Plastic totes and milk crates are suitable containers. Storing traps is a matter of preference but I prefer a rubber maid style tote. Buckets are another option if lids are available. I also like to place a plain piece of charcoal (without easy lite fluid) in each container to absorb other foreign odors. The containers you use should be labeled in some manner and the contents itemized. I use duct tape with a permanent marker. I would write" #2 victor – 3 dozen"

The containers should be portable enough to load on to or empty into one on the truck.

I use the same methods for stabilizers and accessories.

T bar stakes are put into collars to keep them together and organized.

Bait is put into a bucket with screw on lid. The lid is at times left off depending upon the need and days plan.

Top Photo: Plastic tote.
Bottom photo: Figure 1 uses collars to store trap stakes. Here square tubing is used.

Anchoring systems

Losing a trap or animal is inexcusable

Trappers would be wise to work towards a system of standardization and uniform design

When the end of each trap has a universal swivel you are open to many options. These options provided by the universal swivel include but are not limited to use with metal stakes, cables with quick attachment ends, S hooks, quick connectors and use on drowning rods and wire.

Knowing when to use the appropriate anchoring system takes some common sense.

If you have shallow water then you know that drowning may be prolonged. If the water and weather is cold you know that you need to keep the animal wet. If coon are a possibility you need to make sure anchoring is secure and no objects are within reach which the coon can grab for leverage. Broken wires have been responsible for many lost traps. Decide that this won't happen to you and begin making cable connectors. The 14 gauge trappers wire can serve until you have your other options in place. This wire should be doubled and at the anchoring point two loops should be used for connecting. The first formed around the anchor and the other coming from the trap chain. This is a secure method but takes more time and in the long run costs more than pre made cables.

Stakes

I use T bar stakes with my #160 and #110.

I buy mine and they have a 4 1/2" top T and are 30" long.

When using stakes consider how changing weather conditions will affect the soil if on land and the makeup of the bottom of your stream if anchored in the water. Consider double staking with an attachment or cabled 2 loop. Typically it is wise to have the stake driven in the stream bed at an angle with the top pointing towards the middle of the stream bed. In this way when a coon is caught he is unable to pull as hard from the water as he would be from the bank. Tangle stakes are a good idea if the situation suits and staking is your only option.

Natural anchors like stones or roots are difficult to find. Roots can be chewed by coon if not of significant thickness. Stones can be hard to properly secure the wire around.

If you have a standardized universal setup everything gets easier. The best way to anchor traps in my opinion is with a cable and quick connects attached to a railroad tie plate.

Railroad Tie Plates

Steel tie plates have served to fasten and align many miles of rail since their design around the year 1900. Individually they serve in their retirement to assist the mobile mink trapper. To obtain plates don't be tempted to take them from along railroads as this could result in a long vacation for theft. I purchase mine from a scrap yard at scrap prices and I'm always sure to pay by check and keep the receipt.

I use two basic tie plate designs known as the single shoulder and the double shoulder. The shoulders referred to are raised ridges across the top of the plate.

Plates vary in weight but most that I buy are 7½" wide and between 10" and 13" in length.

The versatility of a railroad plate is amazing. Next to my locations, my traps and my trucks I'd rank my plates in order of importance. I use these plates to make platforms, to anchor, to make tunnels, and to support my rods for deep platforms.

They are heavy enough to provide a stabilized trap bed. They can be placed on top of bricks or blocks and they resist current.

In smaller culverts when placed width wise they will create two trap beds.

They are the structure in my quick tunnels which we will discuss in the arsenal of sets.

By placing a rock under a plate a flat surface can be made at the ap-

propriate level or a plate can be placed on end or side with another in T position for flexible heights

Coniplates are also made with these tie plates.

As anchors you can either hide your plates or take them with you? I've done both and I now prefer to take them with me. One year I placed plates out in the preseason several weeks before the opening day. We then experienced an unusually early snow and I wasted time trying to find where I'd hidden them. The frustration of going down over a bank anticipating their presence and finding that some or all are missing is not productive.

Many things can happen to them. You may be unable to find them because they were stolen, covered by debris from flooding, or hidden so good by you that you can't remember where you hid them.

Highway workers may also alter the landscape.

Others also prefer to take my plates. This gets expensive.

So now I take the plates with me when I pull the line. I organize them and when needed I will load the truck and carry or throw them down to my locations. If a way from the road this may not be feasible. However, the criteria for my chosen locations is usually that they are easily accessible to keep with my quick stop — spot trapping system. To me this is a railraod tie plates ultimate purpose and a deserving form of retirement.

Drags

The two prong fox grapples often advertised in supply catalogs are ideal when rigged with cables and speed ties. Neither mink or coon will take these far. I like to attach approximately 30" of cable for the purpose of providing flexibility. This allows you to be able to hook to a root or sapling or even push it in the mud. I have picked up dozens of these at

conventions for a reasonable investment. I primarily employ these with my body grippers.

Drilling

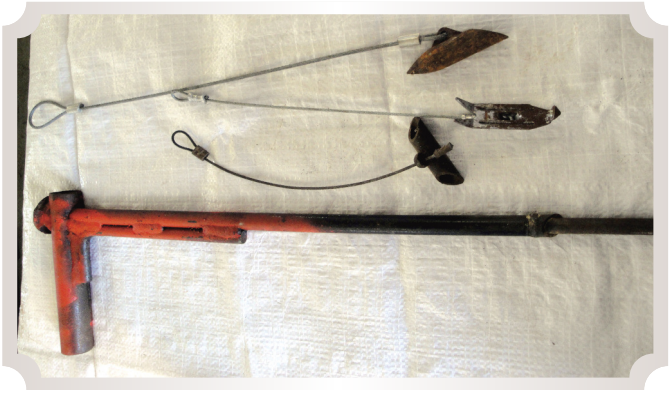
Drilling metal or plastic culvert pipes and attaching cable to this fixed object is another option for anchoring traps. The concern here is getting the cable out of the way and the fact that you may be damaging someone elses property. The small hole is probably insignificant but it is something that is permanent. So check with local supervisors to get there feel for this practice.

When you don't want your catch going into an area such as a very deep pool of water where retrieval may not be possible this is a good option.

Grapples have a place on the work line, and when used with speed cables, sets can be made quickly.

Earth anchors

In canine trapping I find these to be the answer to my anchoring system. For mink my locations are also pretty consistent from year to year. The fact that the point of attachment should be in the stream bed can



Earth anchors can be used to keep your trap and catch where you want it.

make finding the cable difficult for attaching the trap. Water depth and rocks in the stream bed also can complicate this strategy.

I do like to use them when I'm setting up drowning cables. I will drive an anchor in the deeper water with a loop attached and stick up a foot or so. Then when needing to attach the cable for the trap I find the loop with my magnet stick and use a quick snap to attach the end of the drowning cable and simply use a large metal spike for the other end.

Speed ties for attachment and retaining cables

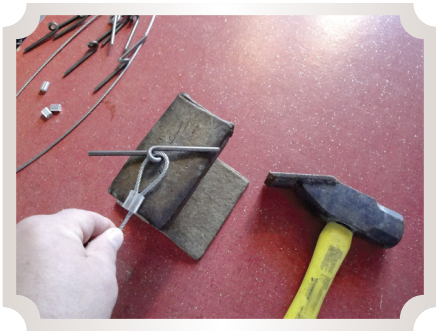
Any time you can save a minute here or there do it! 7x7 Cables 30 inches in length with speed tie ends manufactured by Bob Best have become an important part of my raccoon and mink lines. These small accessories allow me to thread them into my traps universal swivel and then through two holes of my railroad plate. I thread through two holes because the holes are often over sized and there is a chance a coon could get it out of one but almost no chance of working loose of two in the check time. The use of these will add up to a better experience. I can't do without these speed ties. I no longer use wire, I don't have to find my cutters at each stop and I don't worry about wire strength.

To Build Speed Ties

The ends of your traps now have swivels and you are using rr plates so speed ties are your next step to a universal setup. The speed ties are going to be made of quick attachment ends pressed around looped cable ends secured by ferrules. The cable can be of a gauge of your choice along with the appropriate sized ferrules. Slide a ferrule on the cable you have already cut to length using a cable cutting tool not wire cutters to give a clean end which can be easily threaded. Now loop the cable back into the other side of the double ferrule. Crimp both parts of the ferrule or smash on an anvil or other hard surface with a hammer. Repeat with the other end. Place quick connect ends on each end and smash them shut.

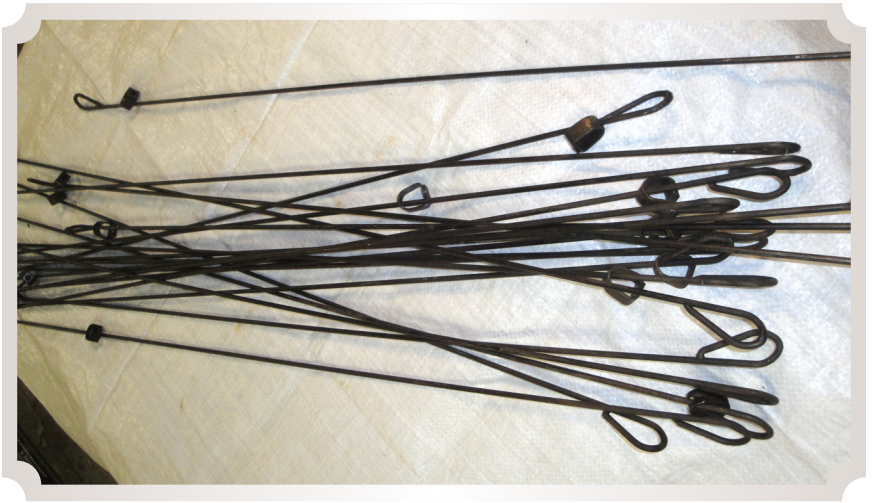
To use thread it through the swivel twice if there is any chance of coming out. This will save much time on your line.

Avoiding tangled connectors is as easy as using Zip ties and tote boxes/tubs simply put them together and snip open the ties when you need more.



A quick connector on a cable expedites the awaiting task.

Building Drowning Rods/Cables



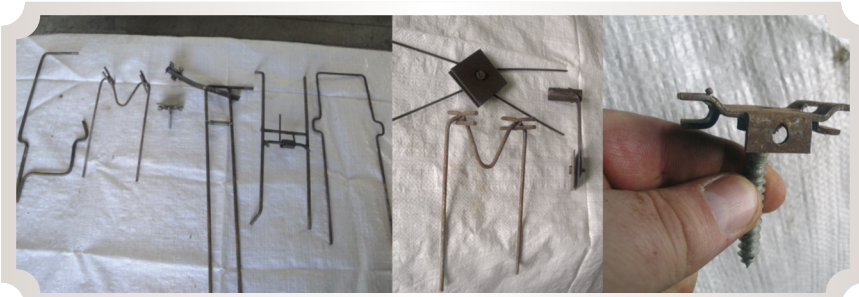
Drowning Rods

The ability to drown your catch solves many problems. The first is the fear of loss by escape and the second is fear of loss by theft after someone else see your live catch. I have purchased drowning rods and cables and believe them to have a place on your line. The cables can be built with 1/8" 7x7 cable with hd drowner lock w/s-hook and adjustable loop cable at differing lengths. This allows you to reach deep water in different situations. Some suppliers sell these already made at reasonable costs.

Other Attachments

Rings, Shooks, Quick Release Fasteners

Stabilizers



Having a Conibear Stabilizer will make line setup faster and easier.

Tools

Shovels are still important to the mink trapper especially in the preseason and stages where you may be adding pockets or making vertical banks. For pockets a smaller blade with sharp edges is an option but I prefer a sharp tile shovel with "D" handle.

You can also use a shovel as a wading stick. For set maintenance a smaller yo-ho trowel may be sufficient.

Pruning Shears and Loppers are used to clear paths, and cut bait pins. Cable cutters on the right are needed to create or cut speed ties.

Cutters — for cable require special design as lineman's pliers don't work well

Pruning saw — these are used in the preseason to cut pins, stakes and clear paths.

Hand pruner — I have a pair close most of the time on the line. They come in handy for finishing bait pins and tuning up paths also for making quick tunnel y supports

Loppers — these are used to cut back brush and briers

Saw — a table saw, circular saw and scroll saw

Drill — cordless with battery and hole bit

Dremel tool — I use the dremel tool for converting my route boxes over to conitubes. I also mark my traps with the tool.

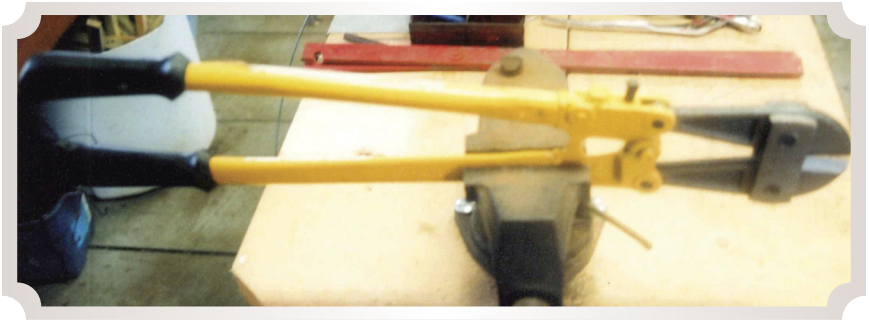
File — when adjusting traps a bastard file is needed to create crisp firing actions. I also carry one with me when setting so I can adjust traps which are difficult to keep set.

Pliers and a screwdriver also come in handy when working on traps out on the line.

Vice — I use the vice to hold traps and whatever I'm working on. The method of placing one handle of my conitongs or bolt cutters in the vice frees up my other hand to work.

Bolt cutters — are needed for taking off trap rings so universal swivels can be added.

Bob Custer's bender mounts in a vice and so you can make jhooks and swivel's.



Bolt cutter's are needed for taking off trap rings so universal swivel's can be added.

Retrieval Devices

Sometimes there are tools you can't live without. For many years I did live without a magnetic retriever but I don't know how. The ones I use are capable of pulling in traps, plates, stabilizers or anything metal. In times of coffee colored water where visibility is poor simply wave your magic magnet through the water and there you have it. Plates can even be found. This device will give you a great return on your investment.

The ones I use have a 50 lb or 60 lb pick up. They are extendable from 23.5 inches to 39 3/8 inches and weigh in at only 1.8 lbs. Mine also serves as a cane for wading and it has kept me from stumbling more times than I could ever remember. But dry arms and no stoop retrieval is all that I should really need to say .

A stick with a hook on the end could come in handy if you don't have a magnet.

I carry a pole which telescopes to over 16'. This was designed for at-

Here a magnet is used to retrieve a railroad tie plate.

tachments used in cleaning pools. I have an attachment end with a make shift hook. This has saved me from swimming and crawling into culverts on more than one occasion.

Catch/Release Pole

This is a must have and I often take it with me especially when I'm checking traps down over big embankments. I do this as the eternal optimist and I find I can use the extra leg support if I go to fall plus if it is with me I don't have to go back up over the bank to get a gun or this pole. I can release or drown about anything I catch with this device. The brand I use is Ketch-All Poles. The size is 48" and the construction is of aircraft grade aluminum with an aircraft cable, lock and spring loaded release of the loop.

A release/dispatch pole is a very useful tool.

Vehicle

When I started trapping I used the old pf flyers sneakers and ran a foot trap line some distance before and after school (seems even at the age of 10 I always squeezed in as many stops as I could), then my parents would run me around, I kept working my way up to motorcycle with pack basket, then old car and nowadays I have a pickup great for setting and pulling stages and an suv jeep with box from receiver for better fuel efficiency when checking .

Dependable is the first priority. Check your battery have a tire pump and portable jump starter

Filters and inspection' good tires, wipers, dry gas, oil, spare belts, bulbs.

Tires get out of balance from mud a trip to the car wash will require you clean what you can then pull up to gain access to the mud you missed.

Jumper cables are great just in case.

A good friend of mine offered to make me a box for my deer rack after he saw the abuse my new jeep grand Cherokee was suffering. This box has made a big difference in my efficiency and not to mention the thousands I'll save on resale value. The box measures 60 inches wide, by 21 inches deep and from inside bottom to the lid is a foot. The construction is of ¾ inch treated tounge & groove wood. This box was one of the best gifts anyone ever made for me.

The author's trapping box.

Designing the Work Environment

The easier it is to put your equipment and tools together the more likely it is that you will be efficient and productive. Complete your own study to reduce the numbers of motions needed to set and check your traps. The ultimate benefits will be that you become more productive and you will reduce fatigue.

On days when I'm heavily setting or pulling, I resort to my 1978 F-250

Decide which side of your vehicle you will operate from- I choose to go from both since I pull off on different sides of the road and go to my stops by paths on both sides depending on the location. Thus, I set up my truck with access to my connectors first and then attach my traps. Next, I will toss my rr plates down over the bank, the bridge or culvert or I will set my plates on a board placed on the corner of the truck bed and then attach the connector with trap. I then will carry all along with a walking magnet to the location. In this way I'm working with my lightest to heaviest. I have the other side set up in reverse order since I come from the front to back on the driver side and the back to front on passenger side. I can easily explain my system to anyone who rides along that day.

Keeping the vehicle in decent shape

Keeping the vehicle clean is almost impossible with mud snow and water being trailed in after each stop. I often wonder why more is not trailed out than in. You'd think if it was even equal the dirt you trailed in would be removed when you got out — oh well — just a thought. Trayed mats are a good idea. A garbage bag of sorts comes in handy as I'm eating all day long — sandwiches, cookies, candy bars and with the bag I can contain the debris. I remove my lunch and drinks at the end of the day and start with a refilled bag. Spill control is solved in part by purchasing drinks that have screwed on lids that way I'm not spilling pop all over.

My truck bed is empty, but is easily accessible when organized.

	Front	
	Connectors - Bricks	
Driver's Side	Traps - Plates	Passenger's Side
	Plates - Connector's	
	Bricks - Traps	
	Magnets - Tools	
	Tailgate	

Organization for What Purpose?

Why worry about organizing? The answer is simple you will save time and you can reinvest that time into trapping mink. The organizing of traps starts in the post season when you should start to separate the different models of traps and accessories. Five gallon buckets are good for smaller quantities of stabilizers. Tubs and bins of heavy rubber construction are nice for storing traps. These containers can be labeled with duct tape with items identified by using a black marker on the tape.

If your line is designed in loops you can load what is needed the night before and reload as you complete each loop.

Your tools should be readily accessible since at each stop you will grab your magnet, and shovel and needed traps with attachment connectors and rr plates. I like to mark my tools with orange paint on the handles so that if left at the previous site they are easily found. I keep a screwdriver file and pliers in my wader pockets. In the vehicle I keep dry towels to clean my hands and steering wheel when returning to the vehicle.

Equipment and Trap Location Shifting The vehicle you choose should

be organized to efficiently minimize everyday repetitive motions. Certain actions occur everytime you get out of the vehicle. These movements are often required for setting or checking traps. If you can think about what you do each time you come to a stop and improve on your organization by shifting traps and tools into an easily accessible order then this is where your organization will really be noticed.

Practice, Practice, Practice before the season with test runs so that when you get out of your vehicle you understand what you will need to grab and what you will do when setting and checking. We practice shooting before deer season yet few trappers practice any part of trapping.

Constant Reorganization — little will go smooth and disorganization will occur — don't worry about complete order just be capable of reorganizing.

General Preparedness

Fill up the gas tank when needed. Since I trap at all hours it is important to fill up before the stations close.

Take a trap with you on each check in the maturity stage so that you can add when sign indicates or opportunity presents itself.

Have tags, screw driver, file and pliers with you.

Take a catch pole with you on each check so you don't have to go back to the truck once a live catch which needs dispatched is discovered or incidental needs released.

I seldom use a pack or bucket to take to the stream because I can assemble my two traps and connectors, drop my plates over the bridge or toss to the embankment and go down with bait container or whatever else is needed in my hands.

Get in the habit of putting your camera in a Ziploc bag with the air squeezed out and carry it and small tripod in a side pocket.

Clothing - Footwear

Many of my sets are made in water — deeper than waders can handle.

Garments are really important for the serious mink trapper because a mink trapper has to love playing in all kinds of weather. Staying inside if the weather is nasty is not one of my options. I check regardless of the weather.

When raining I have available my Helley Hansen rain wear.

My bright lime fluorescent coat with traffic safety strips is ideal for hunting season and checking traps at night. By not having orange on I'm

At night I like my highly visible coat with safety stripes.

not threatening anyone's hunting spots. The fluorescent green/lime however appears to many passing motorists with inquiring minds to be a public worker and the safety bands really show up when headlights hit them.

I Layer for comfort and adaptability and like to have a short sleeve under shirt then wind breaking pullover and my coat. On most cold days this works fine as the short sleeve shirt keeps my upper body warm and the wind breaker does not absorb water when my arms get wet.

Footwear – Chest waders are the only true option for my style. Hip boots limit the sets you can make. You can catch a lot of mink with hip boots but they are not the best choice for many situations.

I wear 5mm neoprene constructed chest waders with 1,000 grams of thinsulate–denier nylon suitable for waterfowlers. They are called the ultimate hunting waders but I contend they are the ultimate mink trapping wader. The entire outer layer is made with armor flex, a tough material that is still flexible. They fit nice and are very comfortable. Neoprene suspender type straps are big pluses for me as they adjust and hold with tough Velcro. There is a chest pocket for your hands, some tools and even shell holders which I use for lures. I have several pairs and when I come inside from running a loop I place that pair on boot dryers with extensions for waders. When I go back out I grab a different pair and in this way I always have easy to get into boots which keep me dry and warm in subfreezing temperatures.

Gloves

I wear gloves to protect my hands from cuts, abrasions and infections. I have many different options from cloth to rubber. Later in the season I like the gauntlet styles to keep my sleeves dry as opposed to my hands dry. I often will wear a light pair of jersey type gloves for transporting plates and setting traps. I often remove the gloves when setting the trap. If I do get the cloth gloves wet I'll just wring them out and grab another pair. I have glove dryers in my skinning room and when needed I put a pair on to dry.

To be honest I love the changing seasons and I like to be outside in all types of weather including snow and rain.

I use a variety of rubber gloves as well as cloth gloves to protect my hands from cuts.

Snakes make great bait

Collecting bait can be a lot of fun when you have help.

Black snakes around houses are often not welcomed — although beneficial.

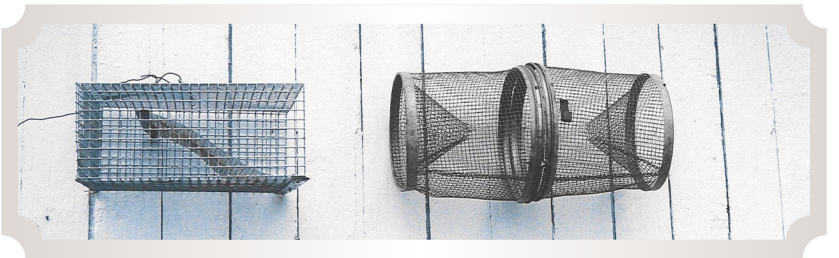
Bait

What constitutes bait? For mink the common choices I use are fish, muskrat, female mink, crayfish and, snakes.

Fish can be blue gill, panfish, perch, carp, or catfish. Junk fish are preferred but all will work. I prefer oily catfish. You can gather some and salt them to emit more smell in the winter. I place panfish or catfish in Ziploc bags or containers.

Bait collection can be a fun summer time activity especially with kids. We gather crayfish, snakes and chubs. Water and black snakes make great mink bait. I began using snake after seeing a mink carrying one in the summer. I find opportunities will present themselves and I keep a pair of gloves and plastic bags in my car so I am ready.

When I use mink for bait I only use the back portion of the females. I cut off the stripped tail about an inch above the rump. I take the frozen carcass and split the front half off and then split the rear section in two half's.



Pickle jars work well for mixing and preparing bait. I later put it into smaller containers.

Bait is a maintenance issue. Prepared bait in my opinion is well worth the price charged if you can afford it initially.

Chunk Bait should be threaded with a stiff wire or pinned. I use insulator wires which I purchase from our local feed store. Bait then can be placed under root systems and a set can be constructed in this manner by hooking the bait up into the overhanging roots.

Bait presentation

Mink love to eat — Bait Works!!

Wrap your bait with grass especially if it will be visible from the air. This will not only keep you legal but it will also create curiosity.

Take a muskrat and leave the heart in

The great kermit Stearns made a difference in my life by speaking unselfishly at conventions and writing his columns. The first time I met him was in May of 1978 when my parents took me and my friend to the state convention in Clearfield, Pa. Over the years I heard him speak many more times and I often wondered why he seemed to emphasize pinning baits in pockets to the point where I didn't want to hear anymore about the need to do so. As a young boy I paid no attention to this trivial advice but I always remembered it I just didn't follow it. Then one day I was building a pocket getting ready to put the fish in the hole and I could see Kermit standing at his slide show projector looking my way telling everyone to pin the bait so I grabbed a branch and pinned it to the back side of the

hole. You guessed it the next day I had a nice mink and I've been pinning muskrat and fish ever since. This enables you to keep bait out of contact with the mud. Bait pins which look like tent stakes can be cut in the off-season and allowed to dry. These can then be impaled through a chunk of bait and placed in the back of pockets to suspend the bait out of the mud and water. I always like to wrap some grass around the bait to add intrigue and curiousity.

In conitubes I simply place the bait wires through the bait and wire to the inside top of the tube. In coniboxes I place the bait in the soda bottle.

Rodent proofing bait requires that you keep it out of the mouse's reach.

I believe when using muskrat you should always throw away the head, the tail, and the feet. I simply cut them off discard and save the rest. If I have plenty I will use half at a set. When quartering I pull it and typically legs come off uneven but I don't worry — I'm just happy to be trapping.

Lures –Smells

Our preacher didn't seem like a trapper but I always heard him say "The lure works in mysterious ways" Well ever since I've been a Believer!

I use a lot of lure because I've never noticed that it doesn't help and have noticed tracks indicating a change of direction to my set. Lures are another incremental change that if used make a difference. I like to even use some in culverts and at bridges. I feel that this may be a decision changing factor as to whether they go through or around a location. It

Here is part of my strategy.

also may be the difference between swimming down the middle of a culvert or investigating the smell along the edge. My quick tunnels always have drops added as a form of cheap insurance. I've read many times that lure isn't needed but to me it simply makes sense that a well concocted lure can't hurt. I think some trappers may simply be using the wrong lure or have a preconceived hope that it isn't needed so they can save money and effort. I can catch mink without lure but I believe I can catch more with it or I too wouldn't use it.

Lures are many. I like the ones that are musky or have a touch of skunk. I enjoy trying new lures but still find myself using old faithful brands. I often will pour partial bottles together if they have the same general smell. I use many bottles in a season because I am a believer. The last thing I will say regarding the use of lure is Halleluah!

Trailing Scents

A mink's nose is underestimated. Smell is effective!

We talk about tier trapping because we understand the mink has many options for travel. Trailing scents hold a promise of hope that if we are not on location we can use smell to lay a line of interest to our location from theirs.

I use my Magic Fish Crumbs — Proven on Mink/Fox/Coyote/Coon. This is a commercial product made from whole and processed fish that takes the form of a brown powder without oil and water.

These crumbs can be spread and carried by water and air. Once they become wet the scent is enhanced and the trail becomes more distinct. Some sprinkled in the water can lay a long lasting trail which will lead the furbearers to the point of origin. This formula is equally effective for coon, fox, coyote and unfortunately 'possums.

Shellfish oil is also effective for trailing scent and it can be cut with cheaper fish oil.

Skin a muskrat and take the front part and, trail the intestines along the ground.

The point here is that trailing scents do work because they slow down most animals including raccoon and oppossums which are not always welcomed.

Boil and recycle your old lure bottles.

Enticers

Mink use their eys. Eye candy can put extra mink on your stretchers.

Eye candy is important. Few would argue that outstanding features are important in attracting mink. Other enticers are just as important plus you can create the interest where you prefer.

If you can pique interest with road rabbit, bad muskrat fur, and wool then do so.

— Attractors and Enticements can come in many forms. Cotton balls are by color and movement effective.

By sight — grass and nesting materials create curiousity. One of my favorites although difficult to find in quantity is the skin shed from a black rat snake — for some reason this drives mink to suicide.

Tin foil folded into a fish shape on your trap pan and attached with a ladie's bobby pin will also work.

Remember to set structure or make structure.

Artificial baits

When using eye appeal under the water rubber baits hold a big advantage. The rubber baits consistency remains throughout the season. Some of the baits I find effective are pictured below.

Artificial baits come in many forms.

Trap Covering

The author with "hulls" used for covering dry sets.

In the water I do not feel a need to cover my traps for any reason beyond the reduction of theft. I will at times camouflage my wet sets but mostly do not. On dry ground I primarily use Stoe's buckwheat hulls which I carry in a gallon sized Ziploc bags stored in a five gallon sized plastic bucket. When I need one I just grab a bag and head to the set. I like to line the bed and cover the trap with these freeze resistant hulls.

Trap Positioning

The two rules of thumb are first to have your traps loose jaw as tight against the vertical edge as possible and second to have the mink step over the levers and not over the jaws.

An exception to the loose jaw rule follows.

With regards to positioning the loose jaw against the structure this means the dog is pointing out into the water and the free jaw can be moved up and down. In tubular shaped culverts with a corrugated/ribbed wall the free jaw can be pushed up and the pan can rest on a raised rib and firing can be hindered. In cases like that your options are to make a flat surface, use a guide stick to put the mink on the trap, or put the dog towards the wall recessing the mechanism in a groove between ribs. Other situations may arise where this rule of thumb is better served by the exception. The hugging principal should always be considered.

The second rule also has much wisdom and merit. The concern here comes from guessing which way the mink will be traveling. In studying tracks at pockets I've noticed that the minks tendency to just stick its head in a big hole doesn't always happen. After watching Mark June discuss the 45 degree principal with canines and watching Clint Locklear's teachers of the night videos with other species I've noticed mink will on occasion do the same thing.

If that hole is big enough to hold a threat the mink may move out and come into the hole at a slight angle prepared to capture anything which tries to flee and flee itself if a threat occurs. Thus, at my pockets where the trap is placed on an approach/side I like to have a slight angle. If a trap were placed on both sides I'd have a v type coverage. And if the trap was deep in the pocket the line of the levers would be towards the back of the pocket. If the trap was centered outside the pocket I go with the levers parallel to the bank. I'm not opposed to using some light guides of weeds or grass to insure that the mink does travel between and not over the jaws.

Trap Bedding

Bedding is a term used for stabilizing the trap so that it doesn't tip. The problems which can occur are:

In my fast moving system trap bedding is not as important as some method writers indicate. I'm concerned that the trap is held in position and that the pan is capable of downward movement. My traps are ready to fire at the slightest touch of the mink's foot. I'm often set on platforms which are not suitable for heavy sod. In shallow water in culverts and bridge aprons and floors there is no extra room for build up or dig down. In many areas the stream conditions will allow silt and gravel to fill in around a depression created for a bed. Therefore my trap beds may be a tie plate, cement, metal or rock. If I can build up with sod this is just a bonus not a necessity.

On dry land I bed with the care I'd give my canine traps because that is the way I've learned to set dry. I will create a depression, with the center lower than the traps edges. I will fill the depression with buckwheat hulls

to slow the freezing down and I will then bed the trap by wiggling with downward pressure on the levers and jaws then cover with more hulls.

Trap selection

With the sets that follow almost all can be varied to allow the use of either a conibear/bodygripper or leghold. I can imagine if both traps could talk they would say to each other "anything you can do I can do better".

Even with pockets bodygrippers can be effective. With bottom edge sets conibears are the accepted choice but at times I have employed a leg hold after noticing trails in the bottom. With wet surface sets conibears work as do legholds. I believe some designs lend themselves to one trap over the other but don't close your mind to the alternatives.

There is more than one way to catch a mink!

The set adoption process is sometimes difficult. We all get preconceived notions and when something else has worked we are hesitant to change. When a new set doesn't work immediately, we can lose faith. The sets which follow are simply models which represent numerous possibilities. Each trapper must look at each individual location and make adjustments. The value to each reader will come from a basic understanding of why the set may work, where the set has merit and when the set should be employed. Substitution is a possibility at each location. Your system should adopt several key sets at a time and fill in with others as the season shortens. Try to understand each sets strengths and weaknesses- what is a benefit and what is a detriment.

Types of sets — Arsenal of Set Types

> Our danger is not too few, but too many options . . . to be puzzled by innumerable alternatives.
>
> —Sir Richard Livingston

Diversification lessens dependency on other sets.

Find your core sets and focus on them as you get bigger you need to get simpler.

Don't forget to experiment some as the pitfall with getting big is you will lose flexibility.

Culverts and Bridges

The foundation of my line

Culverts come in many different sizes and are all unique. Culverts are devices used to move water beneath roads and points of access. They dispose of runoff from ditches and preserve roads and embankments.

Some are big enough to walk through others are small enough to guard with a bodygripper. The amount of water which each can encounter is dependent on the acreage in the drainage of the watershed.

Culverts are made of a variety of material including steel pipe, struc-

This mink found both of the author's culvert blind sets.

tural steel plate, concrete, tile, plastic, metal and stone. Inner surfaces may be smooth or corrugated (ribbed) and these surfaces could be bare cement, tile, metal or plastic. The bottoms of any of these could have silt, mud, stones or debris covering them. Shapes include circular, box, pipe arch, horizontal elipse, metal box and open bottom arch.

Current may be swift, or still. Water depth can range from dry to full and fluctuations throughout a season are expected. The bottom end is often much deeper than the upper but in some cases the upper end could be deeper.

The lower end may even be above the water level making a waterfall.

Beaver may attempt to plug these waterways.

Coon and muskrats also frequently use culverts in their travels.

To set up culverts understand the culvert itself. Look around and see if you can imagine the mink's probable path of travel. Ask yourself what the mink will be doing at this location. In other words will it be moving through in an attempt to reach another destination such as a drift pile further down the stream.

Would the pool at the bottom of the culvert hold interest. Do you see minnows darting around in the water?

If the mink needs to swim in the culvert then you know that you need to have the trap against the inside edge at the magic spot on the outside ends.

Double culverts can be set the same as a single culvert unless the inner walls are as interesting as the outer walls of each, are set again if they seem to make sense.

Debris in the culvert can either be used to your advantage or cleared out. Look for opportunity in piles of debris.

So at culverts I begin by going through a mental checklist of blind set opportunities.

Think first of the upstream end, and downstream end.

Then consider the inside – outside positions, then under, and then crossovers.

Mink travel patterns in culverts are at times unpredictable.

Mink traveling downstream

When coming down through they are sometimes looking to dive right into the pool below if there is possible prey to be found. Or they are looking to exit towards the bank. In the case of exiting they will find your trap in the magic spot inside at the pipes end. If the current is swift and water deep enough for swimming they may not step outside the pipe close to the bank but swim to the nearest point with the aid of the current.

If there is little current they are more apt to step out at the pipe's end. Thus, *the magic spots for mink entering the pipe from the bank are the* ***last step on the outside*** *and on the* ***inside first in and last out. O****r the* ***last step before entering and the first step when out.***

Mink traveling upstream are easier to catch since they will often enter from a point tight against the bank at the end of the pipe and then step inside the pipe again tight to the side. They will then exit by hugging sides when going upstream.

So there may be eight magic spots for trap placement in culverts for mink traveling upstream. These would be on the outside ends and ***where the mink steps from*** at the pipes downstream end and ***where the mink steps to*** at the upstream end. Plus inside ends ***where they will take their first steps in and their last steps before going out.***

To secure your traps in fast current you can use the weight of your plate to bind your trap chain in a manner that holds your trap in place. Or stretch your plate above the culvert to anchor the trap with an outstretched chain. For plates — in swift water hook the plate with the magic clothes hanger. Simply cut stiff wire to hook the plate to the culvert's upper lip by making a Z and tip it over.

Current has caused some method writers, who I respect, to have dismissed the use of blind sets inside culverts. Others have said that they don't bother with culverts if the setting appears difficult. This is where I seem to shine with the right equipment. Stability is always the key.

I utilize bricks, blocks plates and platforms at my culvert sets.

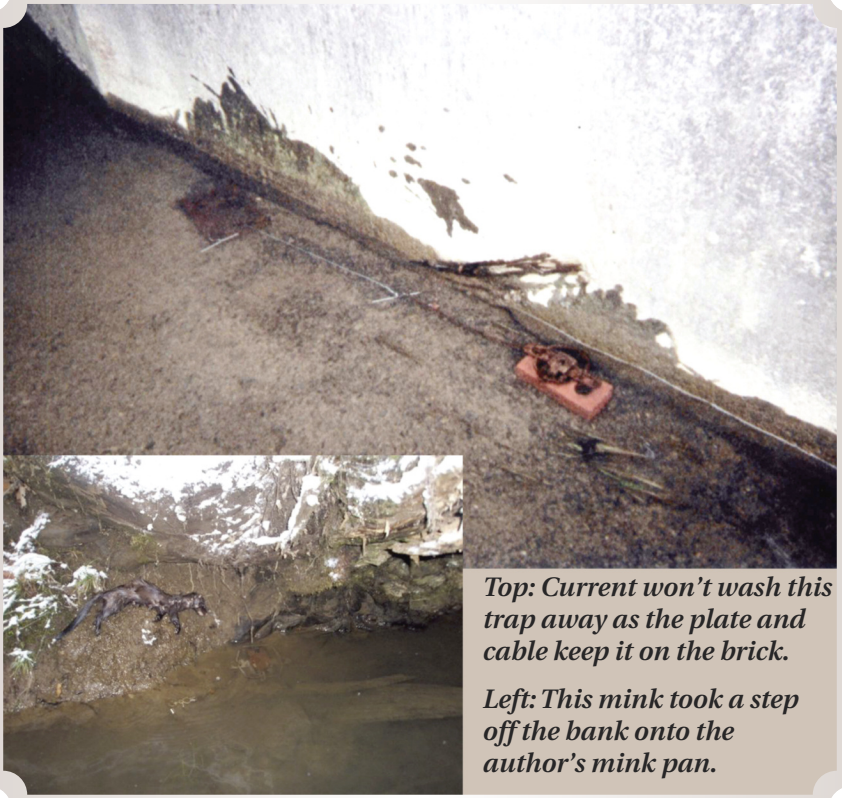
Bricks can be placed flat and your railroad plate can be placed on top. If you need more height consider placing a sod on the plate or turn the brick on the side or on end you can even use a combination of bricks and rocks to get the proper trap

This platform is used inside a circular culvert with deep water. Two T-Bars support a platform adjusted iwth the aid of bowers stabilizers.

depth. Since many culverts are tubular blocks can be used as a method for resting railroad plates on the top.

I've found difficult locations sometimes require using a plate on the bottom with t bars up through the holes to accommodate another plate on top. Sometimes two stakes are all that are needed if the setup will flex enough to lean to the culvert wall adjust the height and secure the stability of the top plate using a piece of wood with hole or a bowers adjustable stabilizer.

Blind Sets



Top: Current won't wash this trap away as the plate and cable keep it on the brick.

Left: This mink took a step off the bank onto the author's mink pan.

Once you can identify blind sets you'll find mink trapping gets easier. Patterns develop — look for any object which causes a traveling animal to take a certain course of travel. The item can be big or small. A stick, a stone, a big rock or tree can create funnels or obstructions. Drift piles are opportunities waiting to be recognized.

I like my trap to be an inch underwater when the mink will be walking and two inches when swimming.

Classic blind sets can be found around bridges, but don't shy from shaving a bank and creating your own preferred structure.

Vertical Edge

Vertical edge is an obstruction which is straight up and down. This could be a wall, bank, post, tree, rock or anything that prevents travel over and under. Around becomes the only option and you will guard the sides with a trap or traps.

Many mink trappers have success with blind sets made tight against vertical edges. Stepping sticks and ducking sticks can help. Thorpe's suicide set is based upon the minks tendency to hug. The points of wing walls are the first places to consider since cutting the corner is a likely tendency. However, you'll find mink don't always do anything so we can increase our sets potential by using a quick tunnel. The theory that a mink is often hugging the wall can easily be proven by studying tracks. However, the fact that a mink can be easily distracted can also be proven. Mink seem to feel a need to investigate therefore we can increase our catch rate by coupling our blind vertical edge sets with an enticing point of interest.

Here a #110 guards the magic spot at a corner of a bridge's wing wall.

This mink found a blind set against an angled wall.

Quick Tunnel

The Quick Tunnel makes the best of both habits. Paul Failor wrote a book sold by the Pennsylvania Game Commission in which he used a flat rock leaned against a bridge abutment. I started using this in an effort to prevent set destruction and unwanted catches of raccoons. Flat rocks were often difficult to find and sticks would wash away. Since I use railroad tie plates as my anchors and raccoon are larger than mink I stood my plates on edge and leaned them against the vertical bank or wall. My mink catch immediately increased and my incidental coon take was eliminated at these sets. However, at locations where the water was deeper than a few inches the plates caused the tunnel to run out of head room. Thus, I found that two y'd sticks inserted in the top plate holes served to push the plate out and create a roof when leaned against the wall. (y'd end pointing towards the wall and up some to allow lean and support with length of the y's approximately 6")

I'd then take grass from the bank and drape it down over the plate and across the roof. Allowing some grass to even cover the ends of the opening. Situate the trap in the quick tunnel with the loose jaw against the wall and the set can literally be made in less than two minutes.

If deep enough to allow swimming the trap can be anywhere near the leaning plate close to the wall. If shallow enough for walking then the trap should be inside the tunnel.

1. A finished quick tunnel.

2. This mink chose to go throught the coon-proof tunnel and didn't even pull over the railroad plate.

3. A y'd stick in a top hole of a railroad tie plate creates a quick tunnel.

Finding the Magic Spots

The question of how to guard the spots along vertical edges begins with where. For shallow water which meets land remember first step in, last step out is the spot for legholds. While bodygrippers can be set wet I prefer dry with the theory of next to last step before in, and second step out. This allows the mink to see that stepping through the trap will still place his foot on ground. If you are using a treadle on your bodygripper then remember first step out or last step before in. The mink has in these situations already committed by swimming to the point of exit or already decided to enter the water. In these situations you could guard the magic

A finished quick tunnel.

Top: The magic spot was on the inside of the culvert against the concrete edge on the plates.
Bottom: I love culverts! The closest trap concealed.

spots of entry and exit with a leghold in the water and a bodygripper out. This should leave you with a window for water fluctuation of three or four inches.

For corners or points which require a mink to change direction remember the point of pivot is the key. The corner will force the mink to almost always land on your trap. Try this yourself and you will see the magic spot.

With the side walk set you create a magic spot by giving the mink an option to keep its feet dry and use your trap pan as the place it wishes to step on.

Magic spots are easier to find when you can intercept a swimming mink. Imagine a dog swimming and notice that each foot crosses a spot in that stroking motion. Mink swim in the same way. When walking in shallow water or on ground they hop and their feet must land on your trap pan. However a swimming mink paddles as any other animal stroking through the water and crossing your trap at a predictable depth. Therefore, the unpredictability of the encounter is lessened. The difficulty in this situation is not in knowing where you will encounter the mink but in figuring out how to have your trap at the appropriate depth for the encounter.

Investigative Travel Sets

To me this yells out — "OPPORTUNITY"

As we follow the tracks of the mink we see that certain outstanding features will attract their attention. Piles of debris, root systems, rip rap and any other places that might harbor prey or be a den for a mate seem to be explored. In these areas a variety of blind sets will be suitable. Imagine where a mink may stick its nose and set along the way. Pinch points, vertical edges, steps to another level, or any other obstruction could provide you with an opportunity. In these areas the mink may need subtle persuasion accomplished by taking away one option or creating another.

In these areas the other included sets may have applicability. Use them as models for whatever you may find and alter their construction if needed.

Setting up

Outstanding Feature — Read features along your line, logs, trees with roots, brush, stones places where a predator may find a meal, weary traveler may find shelter or a horny male may find a mate.

Either find or make structure.

Root systems provide areas for focus up and under banks or where a mink may need to step to get between or up on something.

Natural Travel Sets

Mr Mink . . . . . Come on thru"

Here you find mink on the move take the path of least resistance or the path of most appeal. The mink could be in a get somewhere else mode or just out for a stroll.

They can meet their demise by using a shovel and your boot to make a small trail or block and fence travel routes to create narrow squeezes. Peninsulas narrow down the probable steps.

Passage ways can be made from wood tunnels, loose boards , Grass bent over or even from slate shingles removed from old roofs.

Running Logs

Logs in the water are often used for travel or play. Mink seem to have a hard time resisting the opportunity to run across these logs whether they are partially submerged, above the water or a combination of both. The position relative to the stream can also be parallel, perpendicular or angled. I prefer to use #110 conibears when the log is within the water course. You can use a screw in stabilizer or roofing nails. Caution should be used as logs tend to float when flooding occurs so you should anchor the log to prevent loss. Crossing logs may also catch non-targets such as squirrels.

Mink love to run logs in and along the water and this should be a type of opportunity for you to recognize.

Platform construction

Blind platform sets

I have a variety of tools to build platforms. Lets start with shallow and work up.

Sods can be cut and turned over or not to create a great trap bedding area and with all the following methods sod can give you the final adjustment needed. (As we get deeper I personally worry less about bedding but more about stability).

Bricks measure approximately 7" long x 3 3/4" w and between 2 1/4" x 2 3/4" thick.

Blocks, Rocks and Plates.

Use your imagination to build up platforms.

Use your imagination to build up platforms. You can use sod on top of a stone

Railroad plate on the side or flat.

Combinations of a plate on end, with another forming a T.

Bricks laying flat measure about 2¼” to 2¾”on the side measure, 3¾” on end 7½”.

Cement blocks 16” on end, 9½” wide and 7½” deep.

Blocks for vertical walls, for round culverts use a plate also.

Rods

Rods with platforms for blind sets at the surface of deeper water can be made by cutting boards 7" long by 5 1/2" wide and cut a notch 4 inch deep by 1 3/4 wide then drill a corresponding 1/2" hole in the back edge. The rod I use is 1/2" smooth steel and they range from two to four feet with most being around 30". A binding effect holds the board in place as the weight of the trap is placed on the platform. To raise or lower the platform simply lift the end opposite the hole until the binding is relieved and slide up and down.

Conirods with route box attachments modified act the same way although I sometimes use a rubber band or a girl's elastic hair tie to prevent sliding if smooth rods are used.

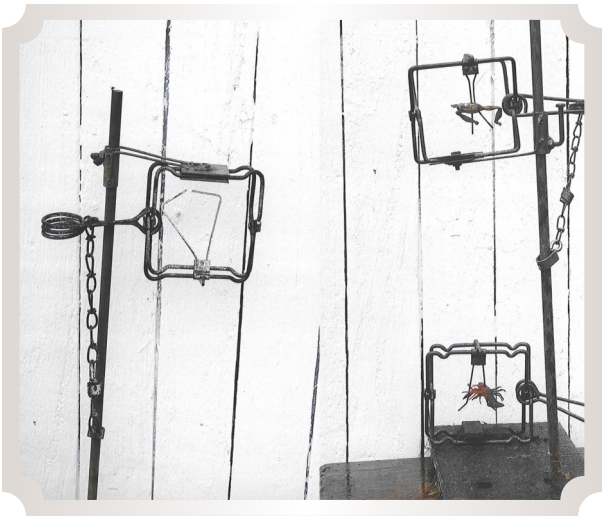
Here is a route box bracket is used as an adjustable platform.

Conirods with route box attachments modified act the same way although I sometimes use a rubber band or a girls elastic hair tie to prevent sliding if smooth rods are used.

Mink swim back and forth in pools of water on the surface and on the bottom. Often along the edge of the vertical structure on the top of the water which is where I employ the stabilizers to help hold my platforms or when turned the other way to stabilize a body gripper.

The bonus for this set came when I ran across a video that had a mink swimming around a pier back and forth up and down but often along the edge of the vertical structure on the top of the water.

Plates — in swift water hook the chain above, in culverts, with the magic hanger.



Bowers Adjustable Stabilizers.
A conirod /plate is used for a baited bottom and baited surface set.

Platforms

Plates and stakes in culverts or any uneven bottom situations which require flexibility can be constructed using rail road plates on top and bottom with t bar stakes placed through the outer holes of the plates. Do this with the bottom plate and allow your plate to become stable on the bottom and position your t bars near the culvert or bridge edge wall then install bowers stabilizers and tighten one at a level which will allow the top plate to rest with trap just under water. Next put the trap's end swivel over the other rod and then add the other bowers stabilizer above the trap's swivel creating a secure trap between the bottom plate and stabilizer. Now add the top plate and position the trap loose jaw tight.

Blind Bottom Edge

Blind Bottom Edge sets made famous by Smythe and Noonan is effective for covering blind locations under the water and on the bottom up tight to structure. I find that the mink I take often seem to be hunting up stream although some are taken going down stream. The theory with this set is to place the trap with the spring away from the bank and the jaws tight against the structure. Points of interest which create a corner/ angle which projects into the stream seem to be the most effective locations. Belief is that they hug these points when swimming on the bottom in search of food. Books and DVD's by Smythe and Noonan are well worth the investment to understand the intricacies of this concept.

Here a shallow bottom edge set connected on the last check of the season. The undercut bank was in two feet of water.

Blind Bottom Middle

Paul grimshaw made a difference in my mink trapping career the day I heard him speak of catching mink in the bottom of pools with conibears. I started looking for opportunities and began to experiment. I find that mink will enter from the bottom of pools and swim naturally through a trap almost as if attracted to structure itself. Some will also come from the upper part of a pool and be caught. I have seen chubs dart through my traps and I expect a mink chasing a meal may follow them through the jaws of death. Now when I'm successful I sing, Hey diddle diddle we got another one from the middle

Which leads us to my coniplate effectiveness.

Bottom Baited — Coniplates

This picture sums up my Bottom Baited Coniplates.

Give the mink what they are looking for and that is fish, crayfish or frogs. If you can serve them what they want then mink on a plate is a simple dish.

The concept is simple and effective. I like to incorporate this key component to my line after my blind sets have been completed. The bottom

edge sets have appealed to many who have tried them and this set simply goes a step further. The beauty to bottom sets is they have proven they can produce in all kinds of weather.

Bottom structure which has any point of probable investigation is a wise area to guard with a conibear. However as we discussed previously — mink don't always do anything so guarding just the bottom edges can still leave us without a catch.

I'd discovered this one January day years ago while checking a pool below a culvert. At the time I had a pocket on both sides of the pool and both sets had been fruitless for over a month. On this particular day I could see chubs darting around in the open area of the icy water. My pockets were undisturbed but along the snow covered bank just below the pooled water I saw tracks. Upon investigating I could see where a mink had come up on the bank, turned around and went back in the water. So I walked down the stream approx. 100 yards to see where it had again entered or exited — I found no sign. So I walked up stream and again found no sign. Pondering these findings I remembered a demonstration by Paul Grimshaw where he talked of catching mink in the middle of pools. I deduced that the mink was staying in the water catching fish and hunting in the water. I had a 110 conibear with me in the truck and I had a bluegill I'd been using for bait in my pockets.

I thought what the heck I'll try impaling the fish on the trigger and set it on the bottom to make the fish appear to be swimming upstream. I did my best with a stake to prop the conibear up. The next morning I found a nice male mink in the baited bottom middle set. I only had a week left but I tried a dozen more sets and caught 3 more mink in areas I'd been fruitless all season. I was sold on the idea and after the season closed I had coniplates made up since flooding catches cables or wires tethering the rig to the bank. When the end of the plate which has the rod attached is placed in the upstream direction it catches a lot of the debris, resists tipping, and is easy to place. The rod itself can be camouflaged with hollow reeds when available. This set is also theft resistant. I now use artificial lures as the use of natural bait requires more maintenance. I have caught mink by using crayfish and frogs on the trigger but I still find a higher catch rate with fish type baits.

Baited bottom sets give the mink what they are looking for.

This is an area along a trapline which is often overlooked and uncovered by most mink trappers.

Let winter come . . . . . I'll Be Ready!

Here my nephew simply sets the rig in a pool.

How To Build A Coniplate With Rod

Take a railroad tie plate preferably a single shoulder plate and weld a ½ inch smooth rod about 30" in length to the area 1" in from a corner opposite the shoulder. I make some with the rod on the left side and some on the right. Now opposite the rod take a piece of flat steel measuring 1/2" thick and 3" long by 1" wide and tack it to the plate with the longest dimension pointing towards the rod. Next take a 1/4" thick piece of flat rod and cut to 1" by 2" for the top portion of the stabilizer and tack it to the other flat rod in a perpendicular cross type pattern. Before tacking everything together set a conibear and try to understand the concept and make sure the rod doesn't interfere with the spring.

To Set

I use conibears of the #110s or 160s size with Bait on the trigger and facing upstream.

Placement, I like to set the plate so that the rod is on the upstream end that way when debris collects on the rod the rig does not tip over. When using the bottom set alone I place the rig wherever I feel the mink is most likely to hunt. This is often in the middle of the pool where the fish are darting back and forth or along the bank's edge. If along an edge then I use a 110 conibear but in the middle I often use my (160's that caught a coon or opossum and haven't been cleaned) since I seldom will reset a 160 after a coon catch until redipped and or boiled and dyed.

I locate these sets in pools or deeper water where prey such as fish,

frogs or crayfish may be found. An artificial lure on a conibear placed along the edge of a pond can also be productive. It seems in early fall panfish come towards the shore and face perpendicular to the bank at night. Walk around a pond with a flashlight to understand how the fish rest near the shore. The placement of a trap which imitates this behavior has proved productive on my trapline.

Water Surface Blind Set

This set uses the coniplate and rod as described above. This set simply places a #110 sized bodygripper suspended from an adjustable Bowers stabilizer on a rod or a leghold on a platform at the top surface where they will encounter a swimming mink with its head out of the water. The placement should hug the edge and be in line with a swimming minks path from one end of a bridge or culvert. When using a bodygripper the triggers can be bent under the water or I prefer a conipan with the trigger hooked on the upstream side. When using a platform and leghold I don't mind using a #1 1/2 coilspring since drowning will occur and little struggle will take place when the universal swivel goes to the bottom with the catch and trap falling freely down the rod.

The mink will have a variety of travel routes closer to the bank so this magic spot requires a platform near the corner.

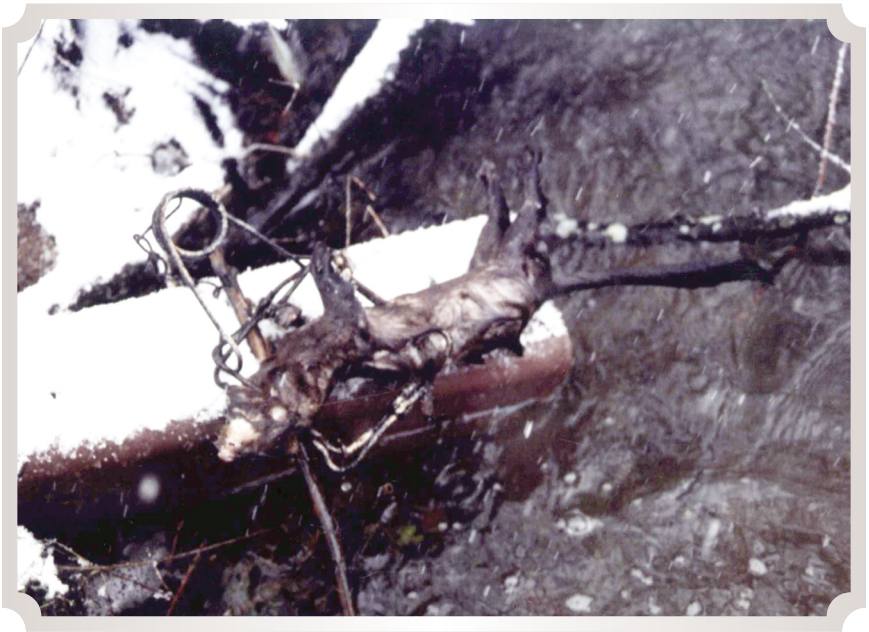
The Stacked Edge Set

The Stacked Edge set combines either the bottom edge or baited bottom set with an elevated platform blind using either a leghold or conibear. Simply covering 2 of the mink's travel options with a self contained coniplate and attached rod. This provides a set on the bottom tight against a bridge abutment and a set just under the water surface for a swimming mink. Other methods would struggle with staking or anchoring bottom edge sets on cement but this method can already have the conibear wired to the plate and a simple blind set can be used or it can be enhanced by adding an artificial bait. The upper level set can use a bowers holder for a conibear or a platform board/bracket for a leghold. The upper set simply is attached by sliding a universal swivel over the rod and then the platform. The trap rests on the board/bracket tight against the vertical edge and when a catch is made the mink jumps off and heads straight down for a quick demise via drowning. At times the plate will be tipped over. The bottom trap will often be set off but I don't concern myself with a lost opportunity. If the catch is made on the bottom little struggle seems to take place as the top trap is usually not disturbed.

Here a platform and bottom baited set are shown. Note this is actually a right side rig used on a left edge . . . but this would still work. (The spring should be used on the rod side).

When freeze up is a common occurrence I often slip the platform and top trap off allowing the bottom baited set to shine as this is truly when the mink frequently travel on the bottom.

Conitubes



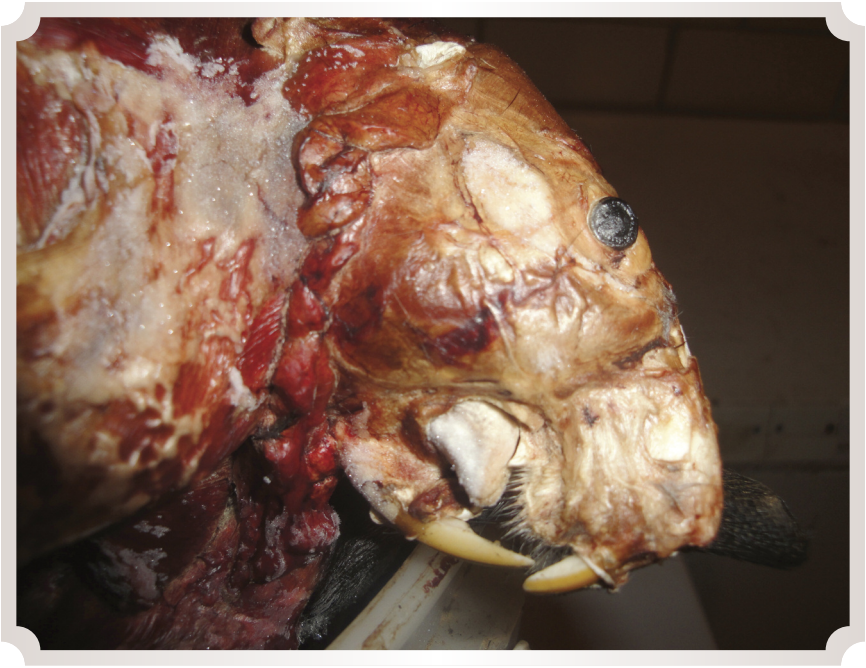
The ideal employment for these boxes can be found near rip rap, or anywhere digging a pocket can be difficult. Even for setting up featureless banks and sandbars.

Debris or grass placed on and around the box adds to the appeal. Once it snows the set becomes camouflaged to everyone except the mink.

I never use muskrat tails, heads or feet in the box as I can imagine looking in and seeing a set of big teeth and beady eyes could make the bravest of mink claustrophobic. The bait wrapped in grass seems to add to the sets appeal.

The conitubes I use are altered from newspaper boxes. These route boxes are designed to accept newspapers and are typically found near rural mailboxes along roads across the country. I purchase the standard duratube from Continental Products at 800-325-0216 although I'm sure other manufacturers exist. The standard size has a 6" width, 6.5"height and an 18" depth. This size is suitable for 110 sized conibears. For #160 conibears the king size measures 7" x 8" with a 20"depth. Various colors are available but I prefer brown.

Alterations to the box need to be made. The first hole I make is in the top towards the middle and to the side. This is used to place a stake down through to serve the purpose of allowing a T bar stake to secure the trap swivel end and keep the box in place. The bottom already has holes which should align with the one made on the top. Next I place 2 more holes to the back center to allow my bait wire to be threaded up through to secure the fish up off the bottom. Next in the back I drill a hole to allow air movement and create more interest. Finally I need to make a notch on each



Some trappers include heads, tails and feet. I choose not to as the head seems scary; and I don't use meat bait with #160's.

side to allow a single springed conibear to be placed in either direction since some will have treadles and others triggers two notches give me flexibility. I also like to drill a starter hole in which I can later screw a stabilizing mount to the roof.

TO utilize the box I wrap my bait of fish or muskrat with grass and thread the bait wires up through the bait wire holes. I then secure my traps end swivel with the t bar and pound into the ground. Mount the conibear bracket by screwing it into the starter hole and take the conibear and secure it to the mounted conibear bracket. If you are using the treadle pans then be certain the pan is not impeded in any way so that the mechanism can fire. If using the factory type triggers experiment with the mechanism on the bottom and the wires bent in upside down L's.

Large box with clear view is the most effective design. Complete obstruction does not pique the curiosity as much as it deters the investigation and entry.

Using and Making Clinger Boxes

I first began using wooden boxes when a friend of mine Wayne Clinger told me about them and he demonstrated their use at a convention demo on coon trapping. I call mine "Clingers" My boxes were made of rough cut hemlock and have been aged by use. When first made they were bright but when left out in the sun they dried to a dull color. I recommend making them in the spring and leaving them in the sun until fall then add your wire screen with staples after the wood has dried.

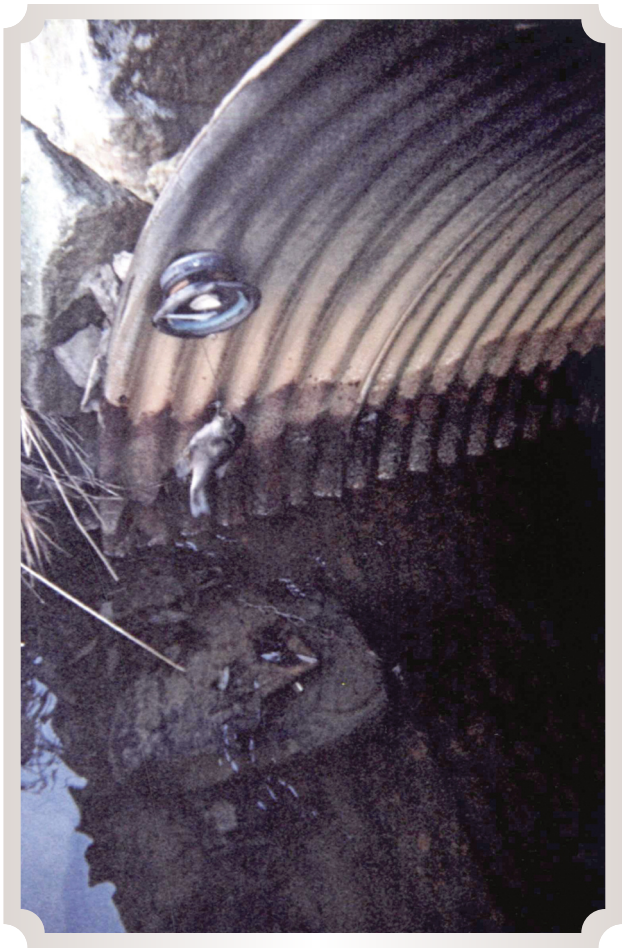
The sides are 16" long and 7½" high, the top is 9½" wide and 20" long, the bottom is held square by using two 2¼" slats 10" long. Wire mesh on the back should be cut approx. 9½" by 10"

It goes without saying that caution is needed for the sake of someone elses pet. As an owner of Labrador retrievers I'm very attached to ours. Regardless of whether you have permission to be there and regardless of whether the dog should be doesn't matter. A dead dog at your box is a big defeat for all. Prevention begins by following the game laws. Keep your traps inside the watercourse and don't use anything with a jaw spread in excess of 6".

Bait is another means of discriminating between mink and dogs. Muskrat may entice canines. Mink like fish and dogs typically aren't excited by it. The use of treadles is also a safer option as dogs are typically less likely to walk in a box whereas they may poke their head in for a look.

Use fish . . . add grass to the back of the box to create appeal.

Hanging Bait



Here a magnet was used to hang bait above the trap. The actual set could be further back nside the culvert to stay legal.

Attach bait to a magnet with a piece of wire and in metal culverts allow the fish to hang down just barely touching the water. Current will keep it moving and attract mink and coon. Place a trap on the downward side where the animal will step on the trap in an attempt to take what it found. Experiment with different heights and depths of water. I still like to wrap some grass around the bait but you have to consider the pull on the magnet. In plastic culverts small holes can be drilled and expanding clips can be used similar to those used in walls and in this manner no magnet is needed. Exposed bait laws are designed to prevent the capture of raptors which should not be an issue in a culvert but you should check with your local warden to prevent issues with the law.

Deep Water Sandwich Set

This set uses a board for a trap support, two boards with bait in between and essentially makes a point of interest in an area where there aren't many other set options. Start by using a plate with rod then take a rubber band, or bowers adjustable stabilizer to keep the platform from falling have the trap 2"-3" under water with the universal swivel on the rod below the platform. Next take a piece of pvc pipe for a spacer put another board down for a bottom then a piece of bait attached to the rod either tied or impaled then cover with the top board (I use a screened holder on the underside of the top board) and create pinch by wiring the one end of the board together. Keep it legal as in pennsylvania no bait may be visible from the air.

I put grass over the top board to create an area of interest.

Lure at the top.

When the trap fires, the mink will jump off and head for the bottom. This is a quick drowning set. About half the time the rig will be tipped over.

You can do the same thing in shallow water.

Trail Sets

If we understand the interests of mink and can open our eyes to see their choices then it becomes an easy and enjoyable sport to place conibears and footholds in their line of travel. Y or x sticks for exact break of pace because we understand that the mink is either motivated by the desire for gain. Or the fear of loss then we understand that while traveling, hunting, and courting. Their routes are predictable. The path of least resistance, habitat, and destinations are areas to cover or cut off. Pinch points, funnels, trails, obstacles, edges, topography, food, love.

Along bank — make a shelf with shovel and foot and guard with a conibear.

Ledge.

Pets again must be considered when setting trails. 160 sized conibears should be kept at mink height not coon height.

Up And Over Crossings

Culverts and bridges serve as areas where the mink is forced to make a commitment. Either through, over or around. Through we have already covered inside culverts and under bridges. Over is in our favor also since these trails are not too hard to see once you take the time to look. They also can usually be set up with a conibear as long as it can be considered to be within the area of the water course. the question of why did the mink cross the road is easily answered. The prepared trapper can say "to add to my catch total". The minks choice to go over the road is usually to get to the other side. These sets are sometimes more effective for mink traveling upstream perhaps because fighting swift current or swimming long distances isn't what it wanted to do at that moment. Culverts that have the bottom end suspended in air so that a mink can not enter are sure locations for crossovers. I really don't know much more than this set will help you catch more mink. When setting up a location look at all four corners before dismissing the possibilities. Stabilize your trap preferably a 110 bodygripper. Consider using a trigger instead of a treadle. Start the trigger and keep the opening looking inviting. Stake it down and conceal

the top by bending long grass to make a tunnel effect. I prefer to set the trap at the most feasible location closest to the stream.

Top: The crossing really stands out to the right side of the culvert.

Bottom: The sun and shadows highlight the obvious trail which Coon, Muskrat and Mink are using.

Side Walk Set

Along any path be it a mid stream crossover or vertical edge — give the mink a way to keep their feet dry — let them step from stone or sod to stone or sod. The mink will be looking for an easy path and hopping from rock to rock is easier than pushing through water. So keep the landing pads about 12" apart and insert a trap as one of the options. I often use this in shallow flows under bridges where rocks are easily accessible. The flatter the rock the better. Just don't give them any other options. In some areas you will see scattered stones where no sense of travel can be interpreted. Take the time to throw some rocks in an arrangement that will allow the mink to cross the stream or move through an area with ease. This could be at the end of a log where a mink could use help getting up on or stepping off.

In the first picture, the mink has too many options, by moving rocks the mink will use the flat rocks and trap as a sidewalk.

Shower Set

This is a very productive set on my line and I use it everytime I get the opportunity.

Culverts with the lower end off the ground above the water level often create a promising set opportunity. Simply look behind the falling water and you will often find a vertical edge which mink love to hug and use. The showering water creates an attractive sound and since movement upstream is hindered I believe they run across behind the water looking for food or a way out. Simply place the trap with the loose jaw tight against the bank and anchor in deep water.

Most mink will run under the pipe between the bank and water leaving the pipe.

Baited and Unbaited Holes/Pockets

A hole drilled from the top down (up on the bank) could draw attention to the hole guarded by the trap. With this drill and auger, I can easily connect the two holes to make an elbow.

Left: Because this hole is drilled into a vertical bank, and the lip is above water, the trap is placed tight to the structure.

Bottom: For this set, the hole is made, the trap is set, and the grass is replaced.

The idea that mink will step on a trap if enticed by food has merit. Raccoon however in early season are more likely to find my baits.

Holes — of all sizes will attract mink.

Hidden holes are effective because mink are hunters the merit to this set is they can find it and other trappers can't easily see the hole.

Slicked up holes can stand out if you splash water on them and rub the mud with your hand. A stick can even be used for creating scratch marks. These sets take a little more time but have been the popular option for mink trappers for many years. Some trappers attempt to build pockets in the preseason and will then set them up on the opening days. Many trappers love to play in the water build and create. Yet to find someone else using your pocket can be frustrating. These sets can be camouflaged and plugged with grass wads to hide from others. The construction concept is simply a hole dug back in to the bank at a slightly upward angle with the front being wet and the back dry. The size should be capable of being guarded with a foot hold although some use a conibear. Bait is pinned in the back. This set has taken many mink and will attract coon and muskrats. Fluctuating water levels may require a high narrow opening and adjustment of the trap depth. The trap's depth should be slightly under water say an inch.

A shaved bank with a hole no mink should every pass up.

Many under water holes have taken mink and a conibear can enhance the effectiveness. Noonan's Elbow sets create a top bank hole connected with a pocket. Both of the holes are then guarded by traps. Accessible from the top of the bank and the water's edge creates a tiered type coverage. These sets will produce but I use them only when found naturally or later after my quicker sets have been developed.

Two holes can be punched into the bank and a trap can guard each or a trap can be placed in the middle. Thinking here is that two is more attractive than 1 and multiple catches could be made if two traps are employed and far enough apart that the catch is not caught in both. Drags, plates or drowning rods/cables may preserve the set if the catch gets away from the hole before destruction occurs. If I'm targeting mink alone, **bait sets are not used until the coon slow down.**

Coons love my pockets. The problem with pockets, is possums love them too!

Spring Runs

Instead of fighting the high grass which showed no easy path, mink will use the water way to go up and down this sudden change in elevation

Blind sets in the middle of seeps can prove productive especially if grass or other material is used to narrow the minks options. Be certain you can get the mink to deep enough water for drowning or fit a body-gripper in place so that travel up or down stream must go through your trap. These sets can last a little longer in times of flooding and freezing. Trap placement here should again insure that the mink steps over the levers and onto the pan. Attention to a free pan drop is necessary because many of these seeps have silt which can fill under your pan. Pan covers or pads can be used if needed.

Pier Set

Go to any beach or lake and notice how many people are drawn to look into the water. Mink seem to be the same. Drawn to easy crossings and anywhere they may be able to gain a vantage point.

Peninsulas provide a point of first entry and it is here a blind set can be made.

Logs protruding into the water provide similar opportunities for blind sets. I like to screw stabilizers into logs and use a 110 with the trigger started to pick up a couple extra mink each year.

Perch Sets or Rest Stops

Mink and muskrats that are traveling in the water have a tendency to consider certain convenient protrusions from the water as a place to climb upon and stop and survey the surroundings. These destinations are valuable if you can recognize them. I prefer to place my trap at the points of access and exit under water if possible. I have even placed five gallon buckets out in certain pools and loaded them up with rocks and sand to make artificial perches. I've found success in doing this also but I believe there are easier ways to catch mink.

Floats

Floats are another option which require less effort and solve a need when other good options are hard to find. On my line I have a hard to set area because of water depth which is about four feet and the bottom conditions are soft mud. The water tends to be close to the top of the bank and will at times of rain flood into a sprawling bottom. I employ a float here each year and catch a mink on occasion with no risk of drowning. My floats are constructed in a V shape and I use a #1 1/2 . The point of my float will be on the upstream side and I anchor with a cable strung through a window sash and then anchored to the bank by a T bar stake. The point has a pocket made of wire mesh and in the pocket I place bait wrapped in grass. The entire point is covered so the bait is not visible from the air. The trap is attached to the underside of the float. Mink lure is used.

Beaver dams and rat huts are both areas of interest in the snow you may see where a mink is using a certain area to enter the water through the ice. Visible trails and tunnels These situations are of great value if you use your ingenuity to place a trap.

Set Selection

> Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.
>
> — Albert Einstein

Our personal proficiency is the key to the site development.
Knowing through gut instinct what mental models are needed.
Rejecting sets that aren't working is a key to building a long range plan.

Sets should be used as mental models.

To achieve the desired results we can develop a systems type thought pattern perhaps better referred to as a philosophy of methods.

These ideas should serve to broaden extend and reframe your system and approach.

At Bridges

Another Coniplate connected.

A bridge and a blind set go together like bread and butter.

Bridges with shallow waters automatically signal thorpes suicide set, quick tunnels, and blind sets

Bridges with deeper water make me think of platforms and crossovers. with complete interior water coverage watch for crossovers, set up the banks where the mink will enter and exit the water. Usually entering at the latest point of dryland and exiting at the earliest opportunity. On the banks conibears can guard these points and are somewhat more flood resistant. Legholds can be placed just under the water close to dry ground. Caution regarding more enticing routes of travel should always be considered. A mink that has to fight uneven terrain has a harder time traveling than one that can either swim or walk on land. Stepping stones can guide a mink just as a sidewalk would allow us to travel. Hence we prefer either clear swimming or easy hopping as an option.

If one side is wet and one side is dry cover both. Consider current strength and points of interest. On the dry side watch for pinch points and consider a baited coni box or tube. On the wet side visualize the minks line of travel and guard any likely points. Watch for crossovers in other words if a mink were to be in the water where might it exit and if on land is their a point where it may enter to find prey.

Middle wet, sides dry this scenario finds your location with sand bars or rocky shores on each side. Here we have to again look for trails, and pinch points. Outstanding features on the banks are usually the most productive and again grass covered coniboxes or tunnels can be effective. The water way itself is usually featureless since flooding will often keep these areas changing with the seasons.

Middle dry, sides wet here we have a split in the water course with an opportunity to set up the middle at the points of exit and entrance as well as conitubes.

Arranging A String of Locations Into A Trapline

A good line can be developed in a year but the mink trap line building process is a lifelong journey of learning, adjusting, trial and error.

These developments include the acquisition of locations, development of methods and continuous personal growth. A tested plan should be constructed.

A general guide line to follow in the design of your building process is to travel over not along waterways. Parallel travel along waterways follows the line of one minks travel. Instead go across waterways to encounter different streams and expose your traps to more mink. Cross the same waterway only once if possible. Hit as many as different streams as is possible and let the mink come to you. If you have competition check for an unoccupied bridge or opportunity on the same water way but above or below your competitor. Develop a sprawling route which encompasses as many water sheds as possible. Do not overlook small streams or trickles. Keep moving and searching for habitat. Building a trapline is an odyssey or better stated a journey of developments.

(I don't know how long each mink's circuit of travel is — and I don't know how mink determine their territory, or if they will come back or when. I just know that to catch them I need to be there when and if they do come by.

Hiving and Hiving Off

In Canada I'm told there are areas where you can register a trapline and then have it all to yourself. That's not the way it is here in the states. Competition exists and is often formidable. Hiving occurs when more than one trapper is sharing the same location. Hiving is essentially trapping together in a place where more than one trapper is busily engaged in activity. Hiving off is when a trapper decides to move or not set up a location because they would rather trap alone or at least not with the people that are there at that time. At some points the ability to hive off becomes difficult if a trapper wants to have enough territory to trap. I use the analogy of hunting for my own decision making. If I were hunting deer and noticed another trapper in a tree stand I would not go and set under the same tree in an effort to take a deer before that hunter. Yet, some trappers will see that you are already at a location and come and set a trap directly beside you. I've even had an acquaintance do this on several occasions and I have to wonder if he even saw my traps. Although a mutual friend of ours has said that he took the fellow along to check fox traps and the little culprit took over some of the canine locations he showed him. I hope he gets a lot for his fur because the price he pays to get it is great with regards to his damaged reputation.

But in the event this happens to you do the hard thing and bite your lip. There is more than enough for all of us and conflicts do nothing to promote trapping – especially if you have a youngster with you as was my situation.

Premature entrenchment can however tilt the playing field to a point where you are left with no other options except to coexist. Out work and out think your competitors and you will be fine. Just don't do anything to interfere with a competitor's traps or catch. Luckily I trap because I enjoy the challenge not for the money. If it was all about the money I can see where others may get very disappointed with less than ethical actions.

In these situations try to develop your sense of humor.

Competitive Analysis

You should have a separate map and make notes of your competitions tendencies. On my map I label the areas where coon trappers are present and note if they usually pull their traps prior to mink season. If I have real competition then I'd mark that area as red. I tend to find that trappers generally get comfortable with the same area year after year and usually I'll respect that specific area. In the event that same respect is not returned then I'll plan to participate in the competition. I will get to that spot as quick as possible but will not deviate from my overall plan just to catch one mink and by losing focus sacrifice more locations. You will find that knowing your competition's tendencies will come in handy.

A word of caution here is that your greatest competition is you. Knowing your tendencies is also of great importance. Ask yourself — who might be studying me?

Opening Moves — Developing A Competitive Line

of predetermined locations into a state of productivity is the key to piling up numbers. Offensively game plan to cover or gain as much ground as possible. I use a concept that allows quick development of a trapline with a methodical plan and a specialized set of the day until the bulk of my line has been developed.

Since we want to encounter as many mink as possible it makes sense to place your bread and butter sets out first and instead of developing each location with all your tricks in the bag move on continuing to claim the prime locations. In operating this way you will maximize your geographic coverage and claim your fair share. Protect your valuable locations and don't be afraid to sacrifice marginal locations for the good of the line. Depending upon your level of competition the preseason and inseason methods will be varied

If you have hot spots set them first and fill in later. Key locations will be the foundation of your line. You want to make sure your hotspots are secured with primary sets.

Development Of The Location

Tier Trapping is a defensive system which I use to cover the most probable travel options which are available to a mink. The order of development of the tiers is contingent upon weather conditions and what other factors are deemed to potentially give the mink the greatest exposure to my traps. In other words the first two days I may only set coilsprings in blind locations. Another day only coniplates, another only blind conibears. On days when heavy rains are occurring I may set only conitubes. In this way my processes gain efficiency and specialization. At each location I track my coverage by recognizing dimension. Four sets at the corner of a bridges wing wall would be considered a flat horizontal coverage, two sets at crossover trails would add some vertical coverage at a higher level or tier. Adding a baited coniplate in the pool below the bridge and a bottom edge set on the other side would cover a deeper tier. Another day's check may find me taking two baited conitubes to place on the opposite banks. In no time I will have developed an approach that covered high, dry, deep, shallow above and below. Each location will not lend itself to all these sets. But the fact that you have in your mind a model for what is possible and a specific day to specialize makes this approach effective and efficient. I rarely set more than four traps at one location. I begin with 2 primary sets and then add secondary sets that make sense for the location. Again this depends upon what the location presents.

Setting Up Each Location

Take what it gives you. The objective is to have a predetermined plan. On the first day provided weather conditions are suitable I will place a specific type of set, but I know if it is raining hard I will set a different set and if it is snowing I will place my third option.

I also have a good idea from previewing the location and possibly setting it up in the past what other sets will eventually be added. I won't go over 4 sets until the rest of my line has been developed with primary and secondary coverage where applicable.

Some locations will tempt you and provide many opportunites fo example at the "fishing hole" I'd like to have two blind conibears near the root systems, two coniplates, two conitubes and a crossover on the trail. All of these sets have produced in the past but it is important to stick with the plan and then set special locations when the time is right.

When you are setting up the location decide if you want to set up the downstream side first and work up or if you prefer to start with the upstream and work down. Consider which is of the higher priority or importance — water clarity or problems with debris. If the stream is easily muddied and being able to see what you are doing under the water is important then set the lower side first so the set you are working on is in clear water. However with this approach if you are setting conibears down stream and working upstream debris can be dislodged and plug your already placed traps. Therefore each situation should be studied to find the best technique applicable.

Premature Entrenchment

> A clear conscience is a soft pillow.
> — German Proverbs

If raccoon season is in before rat and mink season some trappers gain advantage by setting their mink hot spots up under the guise of coon traps. This gives a decided advantage and while it is legal you don't want to operate in this manner for the sake of your reputation. If you are truly after coon be careful in the employment of this strategy. Take every precaution to be careful not to catch mink by setting away from walls and in deeper water. Never move your traps into the magic mink spots we will later discuss until opening day arrives. Several years ago I had my nephew with me and after preparing the truck and equipment the evening before the opener we grabbed some sleep and were at our first stop ready to set the first trap at the season opening hour only to find that a mink trapper had already set up the location. We skipped that spot and as we continued on our planned line many of the prime locations were already set. The trapper had apparently set the locations in the days before the season opened. He not only broke the law he stole opportunities from a young boy.

In-season Plan — Infancy Stage

Use only a handful of sets in your line's infancy stage.

Early in the season coon boxes can be made into mink boxes by replacing 160's with triggers with 160s with pans in an effort to take mink and not be harassed by coon

The first day set all bridges and culverts with no more than 4 traps per stop and often only two depending on your competitive analysis. Provided the weather is decent you'll set blinds on wing walls or vertical edges or blinds at culverts. The second day check what has been set then continue with your unfinished loops. Once all of your loops have been set with blind legholds move to placing your blind conibears with stabilizers in any applicable areas on your already existing line. In the third phase, continue to check what has been set but as you go back over the line have your truck loaded primarily with coniplates which are added when you go down to check the others. You can at this time place blind conibears in crossovers.

In the next phase while still checking the existing sets add conitubes with bait. By now you should have muskrat carcasses which you can divide and pre wire to the inside of the box.

By setting your line up this way you can have your blind sets working for the longest period of time prior to experiencing ice. If the weather on the first days is pouring down rain and flooding is occurring you can focus on placing the coniplates and or conitubes since both are more flood resistant. As ice consistently causes grief focus on pockets with legholds in warm spring banks or conitubes with bodygrippers. You can often keep

blinds working in culverts and faster moving waters under bridges. Everything just depends on the situation.

In-Season Plan — Growth

In the infancy stage we secured the golden locations. In the growth stage we are looking for outstanding features and alternative travel routes.

Roots, slips, seeps, undercut banks, logs, and debris anywhere we can set to

prevent mink from passing through locations without being in peril. Coverage placed in horizontal fashion should be developed width wise (both sides of the creek) and length wise (upstream, downstream) pockets at the waters edge. The third dimension is vertical coverage of elevation tiers. Tier recognition will cover crossovers, high bank trails, waters edge, water surface and in stream bottoms.

Why travel to a great location and then only set a portion of the travel routes. Follow mink tracks and you will note that they are usually moving forward and often do not cover every portion of a stream. Tier coverage as we call this requires a concentration of various sets which will take mink in all weather conditions.

Your line's growth will occur as you fill in the line by covering locations and paths which might attract a wandering mink.

Strategy for Filling In

Filling in has two different meanings for me the first is completing the geographic coverage of stops which were not considered must protects or hot spots. The second is completing the coverage at each location.

Strategies are a plan to action and filling in is action that moves your line closer to the completed stage.

Once your territory is claimed and you have established a presence at all the locations which were a part of your year's plan you address your efficient coverage by adding traps at each stop if needed. You will still have some stops with only two traps.

Since diligence is served by careful examination of sets little time is wasted by this multiple stop approach because you are already down in there checking traps so you might as well do something productive.

While focus on one certain set each day initially increased your speed of development the rigid plan allowed prime locations to be left exposed.

Now is when you go back through and take a more flexible approach and add whatever set may make sense. Your truck on these days will have a little bit of everything in it.

Although what you do have set is not completely covered you have gained more locations and quicker coverage of territory by setting just primary and secondary sets. Now that you are filling in gaps your location coverage will be more thorough.

In-Season Plan — Maturity

The line is set up and while you are periodically adding a new set here and there you are primarily focused on adjustment and service. You have

the maximum number of traps that you can handle employed. Your job now is to see to it that you give each set the best chance for success.

Position Shifting

Position Shifting is a review process in which you can analyze each traps employment to determine whether you can save time by moving traps to where they are more easily accessed or more productive. For example you'd placed a blind set on the first day of the season when the creeks were low. Since then conditions have changed and you decide to change the location to better accommodate a more likely travel pattern. Or you've had a coniplate in an area where debris continues to be a problem so you move it to another area. Shifting positions often make sense, save time and produce more mink.

Location shifting

This is also the time when you need to make the Executive Decision. We have always heard that with mink trapping you set your traps and check your traps until the end of the season. However, I was told early in my business career that the best thing about pounding your head against the wall is quitting. The same holds true in mink trapping — not that you should quit — but a portion of your line may have already produced more mink than you expected and other locations just aren't working out. Therefore, I tell you now save the season and shift your traps to another area to catch bonus mink.

Alternative routes can keep you in front of fresh mink populations. In your time study you should know how each alternative will fit into your plan. Pulling traps can be a hard decision but as the one in charge of your line moving your resources to a more productive location is a decision you need to be ready to make.

Shakeout Stage

Frustrated or finished competitors pull their traps — some around deer season others with changing weather. I often pass up locations where I'd gained permission but others are already entrenched. I will make note of areas where there doesn't appear to be any activity. If I notice traps have been pulled and the location is vacated I am not opposed to setting up the location and taking the leftovers. At times these can add significantly to your catch total. Always keep an eye open for a lack of activity.

Here is a location that a coon trapper gave up on — a big football fan — probably home on the easy chair watching the game — that's okay for him and for me!

In Season Plan — End Game

The season is almost over. This is a very important stage of the season. In comparison to baseball these days or weeks are the last innings. The short game and the end game are crucial strategies needed to finish strong. Everyday you should be tending to your traps. Ice is probably a factor and there is no sense in checking unproductive traps. Finish strong should keep going through your mind. You have had your line established and you have taken your fair share already. Now you wait for the big movement which is a result of love seeking males. This rut comes in January and if you are diligent your line will keep producing.

You'd like to get some insurance runs here in the last inning so you employ what I call the short game. Make a commitment to extend each of your loops by a certain number of stops and in these last innings put your rally cap on and score a few more mink. You will not only feel good that you were able to finish the season but you will feel like you won the championship game by squeezing the runs across.

Check Strategy

Daily check requirements are the benchmark for this plan. Game laws are designed for the sake of your production and for the animal and our image as trappers. If a mink comes along production is reduced if your traps have been rendered out of order by being set off or filled with a mink or non target animal.

The mink succumbs to the elements quickly and in most cases drowns. However traps which may catch a raccoon need to be checked more fre-

quently. Conibears don't require checking for the animals sake as frequently. A dead mink will be as good after 36 hours as it will be after 24 hours. Some damage will occur if coon, owls or thieves show up.

The trappers image can be improved by frequent consistent checks which show we are responsible.

On closer examination get in the habit of checking your culverts from the top side down. In this way if you have a coon who is tearing up all the surroundings on the upstream side you can clean the area up and let the loose debris float down stream then clean out the lower side traps and readjust as a result of the upstream activity. If you do it from the bottom first and then go up you may have to revisit the lower traps.

Moonlighting and Night Lining

The key to increasing your available time is making the best use of all 24 hours of the day. I start by planning hours for work, schedule some planned sleep, and use the hours after kids get home from school for family time. Once my wife and the kids head to bed I head for the trapline. Depending upon the day's schedule of events I'm usually up before daylight also. This type of Moonlighting makes my trapline possible. Needless to say to make this happen it is important to be able to see. I purchase the best lights I can find and have never been sorry for doing so. Start with suppliers who handle coon hunting lights or miners style lights. I personally use nite lites and have several different models and always an extra with me. Including bulbs and in my pocket I carry a small mag lite just

enough to get me back to the vehicle if I fall and break the light or if a bulb goes I can see to fix it. I sometimes use a ball cap with bracket, other times a neck strap. The cord from the battery to the light is long enough you can wrap it around your neck.

Flexible led walking lights are a nice feature

Automatic trickle chargers are a must for recharging when you get home. I also like to be able to wear my battery on a belt around my waist. My favorite is nite lite's hot lite pro series which has a rubber grip handle, brightness control, and xenon bulb.

The Belt lite pro with nickel metal hydride power is good. This model has a Rheo-switch which controls the lights intensity.

Both of the models mentioned have a high heat headlamp.

Benefits of using the night time hours is that you are usually alone and few people bother you. Some will stop to see if you need help. I have had the police stop but never any real problems.

Negative aspects are that animals are potentially disturbed.

I don't shoot much anymore as I drown my catches if still alive. This is recommended especially at night so people aren't thinking someone is poaching deer. If a coon is tangled up where the best way to solve the problem is by killing him first I will shoot him without worry as a 22 isn't that alarming but I still prefer not to do so.

Noon Lighting

This can be a doable strategy in some cases you may be able to check some traps on your lunch hour or arrange to work through lunch and come in later or leave earlier. Having a change of clothes and your waders is important. As you know the unexpected can occur so be sure not to lose a good job over trying to find a missing trap.

Diligence

Patience is a great trait for the mink trapper to master but diligence will make waiting worthwhile.

Mink trapping requires hard work but if some is done everyday the task is not overwhelming. Growing up I found that if I cleaned the barn regularly the effort required was not great, but if I waited and put off the task then the effort needed would be very time consuming.

The industrious, attentive, thorough trapper will reap many rewards. If you learn nothing else from this book remember feeding a dead hog in the barn for day after day is not smart. The same holds true for checking traps that have little chance of success. I've often been told that patience is the key to mink trapping. I can not argue but feel that patience alone is like feeding the dead pig. If your trap's condition is not capable of catching a mink then your patience will result in lost or missed fur.

Since I'm running the line every day and spending money and time to do so I want each trap to be operational and I don't want to be apathetic to the operational effectiveness of the trap. Therefore, I care and check to make sure bait is present, positioning is correct and guides have not moved. I also check to make sure debris does not threaten to fire or interfere with the closing of the trap.

Being willing to show up everyday is 90% of mink trapping but what you do with the other 10% makes showing up worthwhile.

Partners

Taking others along on the line is a great way to bond with family and friends. Some of my favorite memories on the trapline have occurred when accompanied by my wife and my nephews. Not everyone however can keep up. So be careful as many won't enjoy the experience of hour after hour of checking and setting traps. Make sure they are prepared for a lack of bathroom stops and eating lunch from a bag if at all. Their other obligations should not throw you off your routine as pace is important. With today's prices profit is tough to come by so it should be clear to all how expenses and proceeds from fur will be split if at all. For me I don't charge anyone else and they understand it is not a profitable venture so no splits are needed. Experienced and less experienced tag alongs can suffer injury but they may be a god send if they are there and you are the one in need. A good friend of mine saved my life when I took a swim unexpectedly while beaver trapping. Ice gained my respect that day and my friend much gratitude. Everyone should be dressed to handle the weather as wet- can ruin your day- make sure they have appropriate hat, gloves, boots, coat. We cover the emergency kit towards the end of the book but

most is geared toward one person. Consider what may be needed for a partner if you both end up wet or stranded. Partners are a nice option at night for safety but I don't find many interested in setting traps with me in the hours after dark. I use my trapline as a release for work related pressures. A chance to be by myself is often appreciated. But even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. Just make sure the partner you choose is trust worthy.

Preseason – Postseason Preparation

> "In times of peace prepare for war"
> — Machiavelli

The serious mink trapper recognizes that there are only two times of the year.

Mink season and pre mink season. Preseason starts the day after the trapping season ends. On the day you pull traps you can get a big jump on next year by washing some mud off your traps and stakes. Don't simply snap them but pull them and rinse. Organize your stakes, drags, cables. Throwing them in a pile and looking at them again in October is no way to treat your investment. I wouldn't do that with my gun and I sure don't do this with my traps.

Find enjoyment in getting ready — to do many different things in life and experience success you must think, plan, develop a system for everything and learn the rules of the game

Distinguish between the trivial and essential

Move from to do lists to analyzing what activities will allow you to do the most productive thing possible at each moment.

Decide what is urgent and important, what is urgent and not important, what is not urgent but important and what is not urgent and really not important.

Prioritizing your activities will go along way towards catching more mink and by identifying value adding activities you should be able to get past only doing what is urgent and move towards the important.

Sustainable Improvements

Sustainable improvements refer to value created activities which should be able to survive into the future.

Identifying New locations.
securing land owners permission.
Relationship building activities with landowner — thank you.
Planning.
Learning.
Perfecting methods and systems.
Modification of traps – increasing pan size, new springs, adjustment.
Accumulation of traps- moving towards uniformity.
Mapping routes.
Test running routes for time and distance.

Balance

Balance with your roles as a husband, father, son is important.
Weekly perspective will increase your personal production through

Checking traps kept me busy — but I did get time to hunt with my daughter, Taylor — we got the shot on film!

planning, organization and efficiency. You must be able to flex when an unforeseen but important need arises and still be able to tend your line. The kids ballgame should still rank ahead of setting more traps.

Burnout can occur if you don't maintain this balance.

A dog that runs fast, doesn't run long.

Preseason Chunking

If you can accomplish more than one task at a time this multi-tasking can be more efficient. One example I use is when making paths for access, I also prospect and cut bait pins and tunnel Y's. When I stop at a location I take my pruners and a pair of heavy gloves I will in my path clearing efforts simply cut a handful of pins and Y's on my way to the creek and on my way back up out. I also chunk my tag checking with my adjustment and dipping efforts. I will check several traps for tags, adjust them and mark them if needed then place them in my dip container and do another check, adjust and mark then remove the first few, hang them up to dry and place the new ones in the solution and repeat. This is more efficient than dipping and removing fast or dipping and waiting.

Preseason Checklist

New locations –under all is real estate
identify new locations
Seek NewPermissions
Thank past landowners and renew permissions
Traps
Separate your traps
Wash/rinse your traps
Inventory your traps
Accumulate more traps
Check your traps for uniformity
note repairs needed
Make a list of parts needed for broken traps
Replace missing tags
Modify your traps if needed
Adjust your traps
Clean your traps
Treat your traps
Sort your traps
Store Your traps and label containers
RAILROAD TIE PLATES
Inventory your railroad plates
Railroad plates organized
Purchase More if needed
Night Lining
Do you have a good light
Does your light work
Is it charged

Do you have extra bulbs
Do you have a pocket light
Lures
Inventory lures
Put clear tape on Labels
Label lure bottles
Bait
Inventory bait
Catch more bait
Label bait
Cut bait pins
Connectors
Stakes sufficient
Drags untangled
Quick ties
Shovels
Shovels sharpened
Handles painted fluorescent orange
Set enablers
Coniplates built
Conitubes
coniboxes
with straw stuffed
Stepping sticks
Quick tunnel y sticks
Most valuable item you can purchase is knowledge of the mink

The Bucket Theory of Building a Trapline

Imagine a FIVE gallon bucket resting under a water spigot. If the bucket has holes of various sizes in the sides and the spigot is turned on with a steady stream of water coming in but if holes (sets going out of production due to conditions theft, freezing, escape, non target, bait thieves or spoilage, inaccessible roads, inconvenient distance) are greater than we can set then we are going in the wrong direction and we'll never get the bucket full — plug the leaks in your bucket first then work harder to increase in flow.

Plug the Lowest Hole in the Bucket

Ask what would be the most productive thing I could possibly do at this time?

What would increase my production? What would help develop my understanding? What location would be a key to my line ?

What is holding me back?
identify priorities
develop a time line
Set time aside
Review progress
Work ahead
Delegate
Do you have enough locations, permissions
Enough traps
Line designed in an efficient

Develop a Plan of Events

> "Things take time. You can't get a baby in one month by getting nine people pregnant"
> — Warren Buffet

Benchmarks you want to reach

Monthly plan — the steady drop breaks the rock. Mink trapping is not a series of unrelated events.

February — permissions ___ per week
scout and send thank you's to landowners
Build tubes or plates or cables,
develop budget,
follow tracks
March — permissions_____ per week
End of winter prospecting
Plan and think

I find it is much easier to prospect in the winter than summer — here is the same location at different times of the year.

Efficiency
Organize and separate
Traps inventory
April — permissions per week
Plan
Think
Efficiency
Build hook boards to hang future pelts from ceilings
May — permissions __ per week
Uniformity
Plan and think
Efficiency
June – permissions ___ per week conventions
Plan and think Efficiency
Decide what is needed and order supplies or get at the convention
See demo
Buy a new video
Visit another trapper ask questions and listen
July — permissions ___ per week
treat traps
Proper adjustment of traps
Premade cables
Quick attachments
August — permissions ___ per week
Preparation Plan and Think Efficiency
Organization
September — plan permissions ____ per week
October — plan permissions _____ per week
November
December
January — at the end of the season how many mink would you like to have hanging from your rafters?

The MOON as it Relates to Mink Movement

I'd always heard that overhead or underfoot moon positioning was responsible for the most animal activity but I'm not smart enough to tell you why animals move more during different phases of the moon. I do know that certain conditions will produce more movement. I try to do the most productive things possible at every given moment and in this way I will be ready for the periods of heavy movement. Riding the cycles and always being ready will result in good timing. Understanding Vektor charts and

Solunar tables is challenging to me and I haven't yet come up with a reliable correlation. The only strategy I employ regarding the moon is to have as many traps as I possibly can working each night the moon comes up.

Weather Conditions as it Relates to Mink Movement

"Make hay while the sun shines"
— Grandpa

Snow and rain never bother me when I'm catching mink.

If it is 70 degrees and my traps are empty to me the weather is terrible.

I do worry about adjusting for flood waters and heavy ice.

I try to have all my sets working at all times. Forecasts or present conditions will cause me to spend time making water edge adjustments.

By using sets up on higher ground like cross over trails, boxes and tubes, or those under water like coniplates and bottom edge sets I'm usually still in business.

The rains will come — a smooth sea never made a skillful mariner.
— English Proverbs

The three best times to set mink traps are;

1. Before a rain
2. During a rain
3. After a rain

Heavy rains are not an uncommon occurrence on my line. I know I can't control the storms so I accept that they are a part of the game. High water from storms mean increased work for line maintenance. When I know that flooding will occur I am not opposed to taking certain sets out of service until the raging waters recede. I often set the trap up on higher ground so that resetting can be accomplished easier

The fluctuating water levels require that blind sets and pockets have

traps adjusted to the proper heights. water deflection is an old trick that can be accomplished by positioning a stone upstream from your trap.

Since I use railroad plates they are not washed far if at all but their low profile can easily be covered by sand and gravel.

Small floods wont usually effect your traps that cover some high or side bank trails and route boxes with conibears can take some abuse from momma nature.

Coniboxes and conitubes should be staked, and have bait wired to the top of the boxes inside. I also set these boxes up so that they have the opening face down stream.

Coniplates by their very nature are stable and can often work through heavy flooding.

Follow forecasts and anticipate water levels then move your traps to the appropriate depth as related to probable water levels.

If you can keep a variety of traps operational free of debris they will produce Kodak moments.

So remember set traps every chance you get and just make the best of whatever the weather brings you.

Constant maintenance pays off and isn't that hard provided you can find the trap. I believe animals can sense the coming rain- perhaps smell it.

I view bad conditions as an opportunity to develop my sense of humor.

Stream Mapping

Stream Mapping is important as some waters are not as quick to freeze. Knowing the streams tendencies for flooding and freezing as well as for receding and thawing are important.

Here is an area prone to flooding — map this as a Red Area.

Knowing your stream's watershed composition is helpful as woodlands drain differently than tillable land used for agriculture.

The best time to map your streams for ice is during and shortly after the season. Freezing temperatures are necessary and the colder the better.

Let it Snow – Kiss your Grass Goodbye

Thank god for stormy weather, many mink are taken during before and after major storms. The question becomes can you get around. I don't worry about leaving foot prints or truck tracks. You will often see where your competition is checking your traps and this can be a learning experience. Thieves have an advantage when you can't hide your activity. Checking traps from a distance can be appealing but the danger of missing needed adjustments is real.

I take the opportunity to learn from mink tracks

Sheltered sets under bridges and culverts are often snow resistant.

Conitubes also keep working when covered in part by snow.

And the underwater coniplates are at their best when winter really sets in.

Snow usually means no rain and I like the more stable water conditions. Blind sets are still productive and the tracks you find are priceless if you study them. I saw this year where a mink had entered a culvert and appeared to go over my trap upon inspection I noticed the pan was hitting the culvert and unable to fire. After adjustment I had a mink two days later.

I Love 'Good Weather'

Daily Adjustments

Can be made easily if you utilize adjustable platforms on your rods. Other enablers such which allow you to adjust and exist in all conditions include bricks, blocks,and plates.

Depth of water, current, and debris require that you can move fast and relocate if necessary. Therefore, by not affixing your trap to stakes you will be capable of moving if needed.

By wrapping your trap chain around a pencil sized stick or pushing the stick through one of the chain links and then pushing the stick into the mud you can make a quick catch indicator.

Ice — Hard Water

With winter comes ice. This hard water can work to your advantage if you are prepared. Never forget that no trap is a match for ice. To discourage ice build up keep everything under the water. Move traps to the areas on the stream that are still open. The mink's options for dinner are becoming fewer or at best in more concentrated areas.

Since I'm running the line everyday and spending money and time to do so I want each trap to be operational and I don't want to be apathetic to the operational effectiveness of the trap. Therefore, I care and I check to make sure ice has not formed over my traps. Remember water freezes down and frozen in traps will put you out of business. The ice will separate men from the boys. The mink's under water visibility is greatly enhanced as the temperatures drop. Mink choose to enter the water to avoid the atmospheric conditions. Unfrozen bodies of water are often warmer than the air above especially considering wind chill.

No trap is a match for ice

When air from high pressure areas moves into low pressure areas we get wind.

Wind chill factor is related to the affect evaporation and heat loss have on the mink's body. So wind chill is a combination of temperature and wind.

Many people believe storms will drive the mink into the water but my records indicate that the wind chill factor is the part of the storm that has the biggest influence on the minks use of the waterways. I imagine small mammals which are trying to stay warm also tend to go deeper into their nests when the wind chill factor causes the weatherman to warn everyone to take their pets inside.

This is the perfect time to use blind bottom edge sets and baited coniplates. Still I've found few solutions that are easy and don't involve hard work. My under water sets are effective but checking them can become a chore. Chipping ice requires a good hammer and eye protection. A board, a piece of cardboard, or a slab of straw over the hole can prevent rapid freeze up. Difficulty in checking traps occurs for me when the ice is not hard enough to support my weight but too thick to wade through. If water depth is dangerous then get your traps out before it is too late. Guidelines for safe ice — 5" should safely support one person.

If you are uncertain about the safety of the situation make the safe decision. If you push your luck at least take the long pool pole we've covered earlier and use your magnet stick to distribute your weight over a greater area by using it as a walking stick. The bottom line is don't push your luck. Ice melts with winter's passing.

Floats and ice don't mix.

Theft Will Happen

> "Anger is a killing thing; it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had been before — it takes something from him"
>
> — Louis L'Amour

The moment you lose site of your objectives is the moment the thief has stolen more than your trap. Be careful how you react. There is nothing on the trapline that I enjoy more than catching mink but catching a thief comes close. I wish they didn't exist but they do and if they are stealing from you they will steal from others. When you get up at 4 am or stay out to 2 am you don't need someone turning your hard work into frustration and disappointment. The best thing you can do is eliminate the problem. I'd prefer to ignore them and pretend that it didn't happen even consider them a cost of doing business. However, this doesn't help you or them. They obviously have a problem and my dad always said that a man who will take a thread will soon take a needle and then a suit.

Chances are good the thief will stop again to look to see if you reset a trap.

Stolen traps should be reported immediately to the local warden. Not that they are going to come out and investigate and solve the crime immediately. The reason I do this is so that the perpetrator doesn't use your traps illegally somewhere else and you end up being blamed for a violation.

To catch a thief isn't as hard as it used to be. The challenge becomes knowing where the next theft may occur. I anticipate based upon a pattern and past history. It seems if you had lost traps at a certain bridge in the past the chance of losing more this year is higher than normal. If traps were stolen from a culvert chances are the next culvert down the road is susceptible given some time. With today's trail cameras you can place an infrared camera a safe distance from your set on a 30 second interval and get a picture of the person messing with your set. I personally use a cuddeback capture model which is easy to program. If there is no good place to conceal a camera it may be necessary to place the camera across the road. The last thing you want is to lose another trap and a camera. Before you set the camera up be prepared to find out that the responsible party is actually someone you know. Never accuse anyone unless you have the proof. Allow the appropriate authority to handle the confrontation. Don't spend so much time chasing the culprit that you end up having been robbed of what is to be a stress free hobby.

Remember you can lose a trap by not knowing where it was put or where it went and many traps which appear to have been stolen have been pulled or moved by the trapper himself. With over a hundred traps tended each day and adjusted a trapper can become confused as to where a trap should be. Animals can also take a trap and anchor a surprising distance at times so before you presume theft check all possibilities.

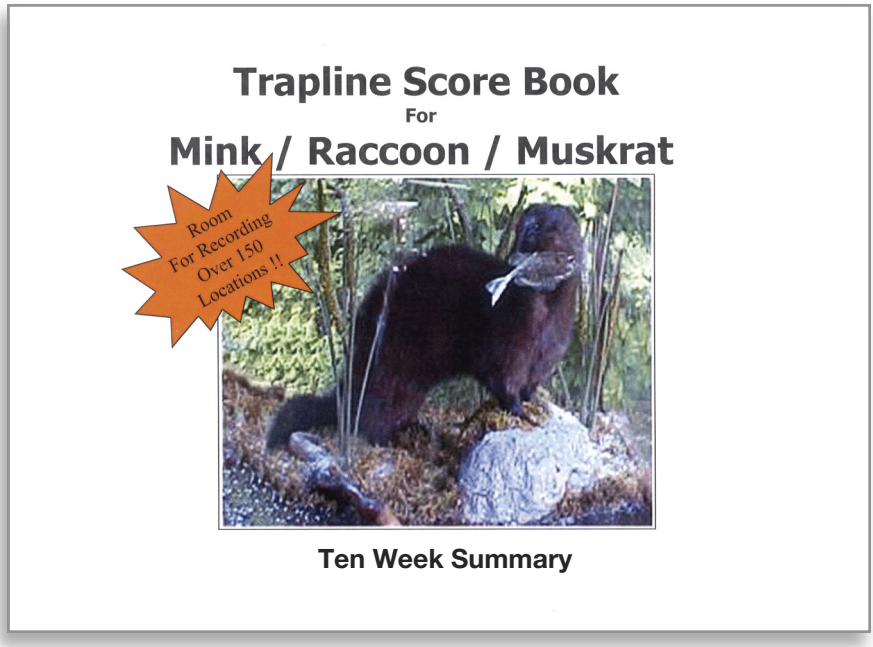
Stream Stewardship

I could give my friend Tim McMillen credit for many things associated with trapping but none more important than what he showed me each time we went together hunting, fishing and trapping. Tim would not walk past a piece of trash without picking it up and carrying it to his truck or mine to properly dispose of it later. He never talked much about it — he just showed that it was the right thing to do. I try to pick something up at each stop if something foreign exists. Even though you didn't put it there you could still be perceived as the one who littered. Not littering and removal of what is found are good habits guaranteed to produce something positive.

Quality Time

I used a little fur money to go to the hockey game with my girls, Jordyn, Taylor, and wife Candi . . . . The Penguins Won and So Did We!!

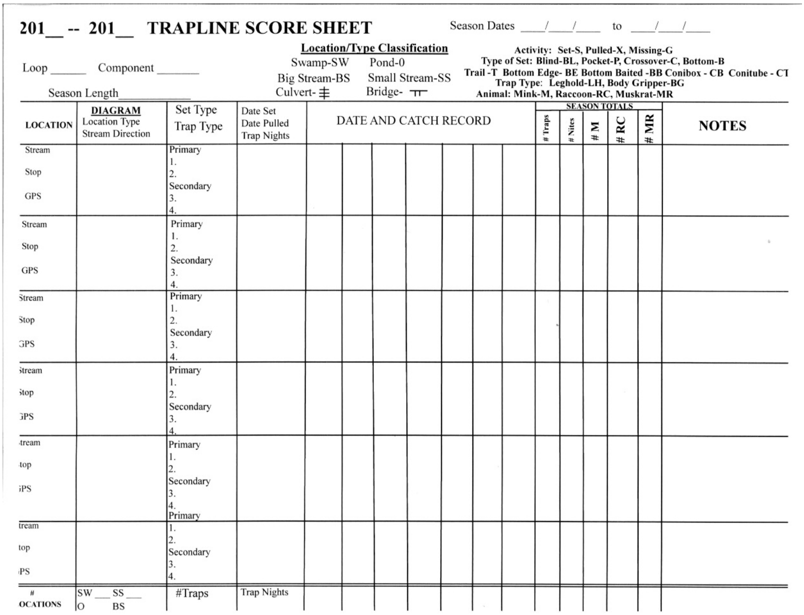
Keeping Records – Keeping Score



Decide what you want to keep track of and why? An elephant's memory would be nice but I can tell you until I can learn to ride a pachyderm over my trapline I'll need to use a system to help my long term memory.

Research shows that our short term memory selectively discards some information and transfers other data to our long term memory. The problem is we have no control of what is discarded and what is transferred. I use **The Scorebook** to keep all my records. This comes from my coaching background and I find it helpful in developing my key numbers as well as knowing where my sets are. If you aren't keeping score then ask yourself if you are really playing the game.

If you are only setting a handful of traps you probably don't need to keep detailed notes on locations but then again if you want to improve you may find it very helpful.



201__ -- 201__ TRAPLINE SCORE SHEET Season Dates ___/___/___ to ___/___/___

Loop ______ Component _______

Season Length___________

Location/Type Classification
Swamp-SW Pond-0
Big Stream-BS Small Stream-SS
Culvert- ╪ Bridge- ╥

Activity: Set-S, Pulled-X, Missing-G
Type of Set: Blind-BL, Pocket-P, Crossover-C, Bottom-B
Trail -T Bottom Edge- BE Bottom Baited -BB Conibox - CB Conitube - CT
Trap Type: Leghold-LH, Body Gripper-BG
Animal: Mink-M, Raccoon-RC, Muskrat-MR

LOCATION	DIAGRAM Location Type Stream Direction	Set Type Trap Type	Date Set Date Pulled Trap Nights	DATE AND CATCH RECORD								SEASON TOTALS # Traps	# Nites	# M	# RC	# MR	NOTES
Stream Stop GPS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
Stream Stop GPS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
Stream Stop GPS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
Stream Stop GPS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
tream top PS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
tream top PS		Primary 1. 2. Secondary 3. 4.															
# OCATIONS	SW __ SS __ O BS	#Traps	Trap Nights														

Summary Page

Name of Stop, GPS coordinates, Stream name, Date set, Location of sets, Types of sets, Types of traps, Results, Direction of travel, Movement, Date pulled.

I also like to know if the mink was caught by the front or back foot and the right or left foot. Or if in a conibear which direction of travel to give credit for the encounter.

How you keep records is not important — that you keep record is. Memory can not be relied on and flooding can change land marks. However memory may be assisted by a method.

Flagging can help but can also be lost so don't rely on it totally.

Delining

Delining at the end of the season. Oh — the one who can paint a perfect picture of a trapline so complete must also be able to disassemble all that work which is just as big if not a bigger feat.

Disassembling the line and undoing all the work that you did throughout the season is often treated in a haphazard mad rush to get all your traps out of the woods or streams.

Concern for the laws of your state is a major factor in your decision to pull.

Weather predictions should be studied. Pulling in the middle of flood conditions is not enjoyable.

If I only had one more day is always my thought at the end and when the last trap is pulled I always feel relief. The relief comes from the mental and physical toll of the system itself. The system I use is all about adding at a pace conducive to maximizing the number of traps I can set and run. This is a plan that takes all 50 or so days of the season so pulling these traps can be over whelming I personally find myself attached to the sets I cared for all year either because they produced or hold the promise of sooner or later going to do so. However, I try to start three days ahead of

Delining is a big job - organization is needed, or you end up with a Mess like this!

time and pull iced in or heavy anchored sets first. Be systematic pulling either from middle to the end or from the beginning to middle, or geographically by line components. Types of sets such as all 110's or legholds, or all conitubes, all pockets if freezing has been a problems. All coniplates, blinds in Pa. can be last since coon are still in season.

I hire a helper who I trust. I feel comfortable showing my line to him even though the loops have taken me years to develop. Two friends helped me this year. As I pulled I'd hand plate, connector and trap to one while the other dismantled and sorted the previous stops accumulation. This avoided the mess of tangled traps.

On bigger embankments I was able to hook my trap and plate to retrieval rope in my case a cargo strap with hooked end. My friends hoisted it up making the pulling of four railroad plates and traps much easier 1 at a time than me making trips with equipment in hand.

The serious mink trapper recognizes that there are only two times of the year. Mink season and preseason. Preseason starts the day after the trapping season ends. On the day you pull traps you can get a big jump on the next years plan by washing some mud off your traps and stakes. Don't simply snap them but pull them and rinse. Organize your stakes, drags, cables. Throwing them in a pile and looking at them again in October is no way to treat your investment. I wouldn't do that with my gun and I sure don't do this with my traps. Inventory your traps if missing some go back over the line and account for all. Organize and sort as you unload.

Take daily steps and keep records.

Pull all weights if the location is marginal and next year is not a certainty.

For years I would detach my railroad plates and hide them near the locations where I had used them. However, in going back the following preseason the plates would either be gone, hard to find, or covered up. Early season coon trappers can encounter them, floods can cover them with debris. State and township workers may have covered with rip rap or cleaned the ditches. One year prior to the first day of the season I'd taken time to place the plates in the open along the locations ready to go. An early snow made the first day plate hunt a big time waster. Going down to a location only to find the plate is missing causes one to go back up for another option. So, now I bring the majority in - stack them and inventory them. I accept the fact that next year I will need to load the truck up and toss them out again but there is now no more hunting for plates.

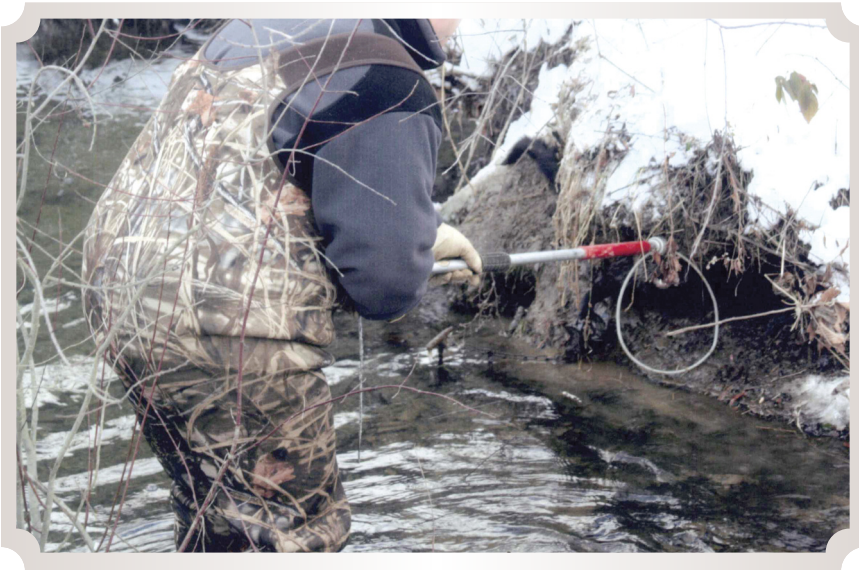
The wise trapper will plan ahead for the delining activity and recognize potential problems. Having an exit strategy is an art in and of itself and perhaps just as hard to execute as the lines development.

Dispatching

Dispatching the animals by creating drowning sets is the best option. An animal that is still alive will assuredly be encountered by anyone who traps long enough. Even with body grippers some may still be alive upon your arrival. Options include shooting, blunt force, or drowning. In some cases when an animal has reached an inaccessible location (in a crevice or tangled amongst brush) where tugging could free the body from the trap then a 22 short may be required. This is not the preferred method since damage may occur to the pelt and ricochets must be considered. The subsequent blood when coon are involved is another deterrent to this method. The noise will also alert neighbors, hunters and concerned citizens to your presence.

For mink a quick rap on the head is usually all that is needed but again one must look at how well the animal is held. If you swing and miss -the animal will lunge and could pull free. Coon can also be killed by placing a swift blow to the skull behind the ears. However, upon skinning coon killed this way show blood clots and blood makes a mess.

One of the best investments I've ever made was a Ketch pole with noose. With this I can secure my catch or release it if it was not an intended target. For raccoons, muskrats and mink I can easily move them with or without foot held in the trap to water deep enough to submerge the mouth and nose for drowning. I will usually do this as soon as encountered and then tend to my other traps as well as the remake. Allowing extra time for the sure dispatch and not wasting time waiting for the last breath to be taken. The pole when placed with an animal back over shoulder is also an easier way to haul big animals out of the woods or to place animals up over embankments.



Here I use a pole to release a Fisher.

Pelt Care

Pelt Care on the line begins with the dispatching method but what you do afterwards makes a big difference in your end result.

Once the animal has died — be sure. Grasp the rear feet and if clean and dry keep it that way. If wet wash in the clean water then grasp by the head and snap or use your hand to squeegee the water out. At your vehicle wrap the animal in newspaper or towel. I prefer the shamwow type absorbent towels as they absorb the water and they can be wrung out easily with tight twisting. I do save the local papers for this purpose. In freezing temperatures make sure the wet hairs don't come in contact with anything metal as they will be damaged if pulling to separate. If this does happen be patient allow the dead carcass to thaw. When you go to sell your furs and those who admire your work ask for your secrets just say — SHAMWOW.

Fur Shed

In a perfect world everyone would have a building they can call their own just for trapping. This structure may be an old garage, milk house, or shed. The building should have heat, lights and it would be nice to have water. The floor can be covered with a tarp or newspapers and under the work area even cardboard can do to prevent big messes. Rodents are one feature the fur shed doesn't need. I have a chocolate and yellow lab that enjoy cleaning up the scrap fat from the floor. Mess and odor can be a part of the shed but with effort this can be controlled to whatever degree you find comfortable. I personally like to keep some mess and odor to remind me I'm in a special place. I've tried plastic, cardboard and carpet beneath the tub placed under my fleshing beam. Another bucket is placed under the vice grips in my skinning areas. I empty my carcass buckets into a large tub outside the shed. The favorite part of my shed is the ceiling where I have installed boards with hooks measured and spaced for hanging pelts on stretchers. The easiest way to accomplish this is to measure, drill, and screw the hooks in the board while on your bench then put the board on the ceiling with screws. A freezer comes in handy for bait and animals you wont get to before spoiling could occur.

Fur handling tools

Instead of knives I use scalpels. There is a difference between a knife

The author enjoys a moment in his fur shed.

and a scalpel. Once you see the difference you may never use a knife to skin again. Buy your scalpels from a taxidermy source as opposed to a medical supplier. There is usually a big difference in price. I recommend a permanent handle with replaceable blades.

Have an area for your stretchers. I prefer wood stretchers but wire will work. Tail strippers hand held or bench mountable is a matter of preference. In a pinch you can make one from a branch or split dowel rod.

For holding my catch I use a pair of vice grips mounted by a short cable to my bench. I prefer to sit down to skin mink and muskrats. Tail zippers, a slitting guide, a slitting scalpel, a sharpening stone, old rags and fleshing tools are some of the necessities you should find in a fur shed in the perfect world.

A Fleshing Beam sized especially for mink and muskrats is very helpful.

Our Labrador Retrievers — The Best Way to Clean Fleshing Tools — Reese & Sam

Skinning a Mink

Now that you have the mink dry and the fur free of mud and silt. Skin it in a cased fashion. Cased will require you to cut the area from the heel of the hind leg to the vent between the legs over to the other hind heel. The cut should be more on the under side of the legs. Cut the hide only around each heel and then slit from the vent up to the under side of the tail, free the hide from the body and pull down from the legs, work your finger in between the carcass and tail bone and take a tail bone

Males and females can vary in size

puller/stripper to remove the tail and pelt together from the carcass. Use a tail zipper or guide with sharp scalpel to slit open the tail. Now pull the hide down towards the head, pull the front legs out from the hide and cut the hide off once you can feel the ankles have cleared. Continue to the head look for small lump which indicate the ears and cut them off close to the flesh on the skull. Continue until you find the eyes and insert your blade to free the eyes of the skin around them. Next, on the under side the lower lip can be cut off. You will pull down until you find the nose and you can cut this off. The hide should be free from the carcass.

Handling The Pelt

To begin fleshing place the pelt on a mink beam and take the fat off down around the tail and legs, then start up around the ears and head- continue to flesh any significant meat and fat off with the appropriate tools or a large spoon may work. Males will have more fat and this should be removed from all areas including under the membrane below the shoulders on the back of the mink. This saddle should be left on but as mentioned any fat should be removed. I have a bucket full of fine sawdust cuttings which I use to keep fat minimized in an effort to keep the fur free of grease. Stretch leather side out on a board made of soft wood. Use the appropriate size -for male and female differ. Place the pelt on so that the eyes and ears and tail are centered on the back portion of the board and belly underneath. Don't stretch the skin too tight. Pin the tail open by using a piece of window or plastic screen. Use push pins to tack the back portion of the hide to the board. A wedge is optional and is sometimes

What would I do if I didn't have good friends!
Harry & Melvin . . . Thank you for the help!

used to make the removal easier. In many cases if you are having trouble removing a pelt check to make sure your push pin didn't break and the pin portion is still holding the hide to the board.

Cut the front legs off so that they don't extend down in a folded manner. Pin the back legs on the tail side. An inspection window can be created by cutting around the vent be careful to keep this about an inch long and only on the underside of the board.

When sorting for the market divide by gender either male or female. You can further estimate your classifications as I've learned industry standards often acknowledge four sizes. Two of which apply to males and two to females. Males are divided into 21 plus inches = xl-l, 18" to 21" medium to large, females 17 to 18" medium and under 17" small. I like to hang my mink from small hooks in boards which are then mounted to the ceiling.

Skinning Muskrats

If you are going to trap mink you are going to catch muskrats. Simply cut around the tail cut down to the vent from the base of the tail after going from heel to vent and heel to vent. Open the muskrat up by working the hide down from the legs and tail. Then set the rat on its butt and push the head into the shoulders pulling the hide up over stopping only to pull out the legs. Cut at the base of the ears then cut out the eye opening, the mouth and nose. Use wire stretchers after fleshing to dry.

Cashing Out — Selling Your Hides

Several conventional options are available to the trapper. The first option is to visit your local fur buyer.

To me the ability to arrange a private appointment, throw the hides in the truck and drive less than an hour away to meet in person with a friend is an annual trek which I enjoy. My family or friends often go with me. Some years I believe I even get more than had I waited for the auction.

Local sales where several buyers come to compete for fur has merit in theory. This usually involves paying a fee to the hosting site. Getting there early is often a good strategy. Long lines are sometimes a part of this process. Each buyer often has a table, a line forms, he looks at your lot and gives a bid. You do have the option of not selling. If you don't want to sell at the prices offered — you take your remaining pieces home.

The big auction houses like nafa and fur harvesters accept your shipped furs or you can take them to agents at pickup sites. Your money is sent to you after an actual auction takes place. If your lot doesn't sell you may have to wait for another auction. Costs come out of your check .

Tim McMillen (standing) and Brian Miller watch as Fur Buyer Gary Sunderland grades my catch. My daughter Jordyn looks on in anticipation of our big "Pay Day" — at least enough for ice cream!

Everyone from the local buyers to the auction houses need to make a living so don't begrudge them for trying to make a profit.

If however you don't feel the prices offered are fair you can choose to have your hides tanned and make anything from a teddy bear for your special ones to a mink coat for your wife. These will cost you extra dollars but the value may be hard to measure. Companies offering these services can be found in your trapping related publications or search engines.

End of the Season Review — Planning and Analysis

Once the traps are all pulled and the truck is unloaded, plans for next year's trapline can begin.

Drive your line again and look for and note locations that were not set because of time restraints or perhaps a lack of permission. Gaining permission and prioritizing the stop in your development plan can be on your to do list for next year.

On my line I recognize culverts or bridge walls that were passed over because the equipment I had available didn't suit. Then I make what I need for next year.

Warm spring recognition becomes easy to identify when everything else is frozen. The months of February and March are great times to find more territory and explore.

– there is a difference between building and starting a line. Building will be a journey which will only end when you turn back or decide you have reached your destination. As soon as possible send a thank you and

let the landowner know you are done for the season. Express your appreciation and ask for the opportunity to trap again next year.

Now that the season is over organize your records and review your numbers. Note productive locations and analyze areas for concern.

Get started as soon as you recover from the season's toll.

Thank YOU

Send a Note Of Thanks when you get Permission and Each Year after the Season.

Some Thoughts to Ponder

We talk about critical mass but big is not always better. One of my best friends is fond of saying "Much often wants more"

Slow is not always safer.

Low cost is not always cheaper.

Budgets should not always be followed.

Forecasts are not always correct.

Implementation is not always easy.

Control is not meant for everything.

Don't over analyze.

Make mistakes and keep trying.

Don't worry about missing the ball - worry you never get to swing.

Act as if there are spectators.

People are a part of our hobby.

Focus on standardization, specialization, quantification, efficiency, production and enjoyment.

Action should not stop when planning starts.

Ask why some catch many while other struggle to catch a few.

Incremental improvements and changes in your patterns will result in an upward spiraling movement regarding your productivity.

The first steps are setting goals and belief that you can accomplish your goals.

What you think about most will be what you become.

Parting Tips

Become aware of alternatives.

Read, ask, look, study and listen.

Be safe.

You have within you a winning formula.

The challenge is to reexamine what you take for granted.

Don't give up.

No other person can successfully coach your effort you must take charge.

Desire is the key to catching mink

Knowledge is available if disciplined study is pursued.

Learn from your mistakes and ask why?

Innovate.

Plan and be organized.

Forge ahead and keep trying.

Find a mentor and be a mentor.

Develop a group of friends with specialized knowledge.

Be positive

Rein in unrealistic ambitions.

Develop a simple strategy.

Do not have excessive expectations.

Understand that even if you are on the right track you'll get run over if you just sit there!

Flipping Out — Photographing

I found happiness when I learned about the hd flip video camera which allows a user to take video clips and easily put them together on your computer to form your own movie. The device plugs right into the computer and you just drag the clips over for storage.

Life passes us by in a hurry. My memories are held now in photos and video. I barely recall my first double (on oppossums) as a 10 year old. I wish I had a photo of that event as each year my memory fades. I cherish a few polaroids my mom took of those early years.

Cameras now are advancing at great speed. Resolution is a key but for me I want a cheap tripod and a serviceable digital camera. I don't recommend a lot of bells and whistles for the average trapper. The reason I like the flip video is because it has capabilities that are simple to use.

I still use a cheap camera at times because they will and do get wet.

The best photos will be of you and someone else with a catch or special moment captured in time. Pictures and video becomes even more cherished when you share them with living friends. Upon the loss of a friend you can always have the moment in time captured. The best results are when the action includes you and your family/friends in the scenes. I use a tripod when convenient. Try to get as close as possible and use your wide settings for close ups. Turn your camera sideways and try a vertical shot if you want background like a tall tree or an entire vertical scene to tell the story.

Eliminating background detractions can be accomplished by repositioning. Try to keep the scene level and with the video — still is good.

Be ready for the picture and act happy, as your face will help tell the story.

Stage the catch by fluffing it up after a few quick snaps to get the water out. Accessories like a shovel, pack basket, or traps in your hand tell a little more about your event.

Get a variety of pictures-some snow, flooding, sunny days, fall and winter.

If you try the flip video you may find that it could be the difference between a lasting memory and a fading recollection.

Dead is Bad for Productivity

Parking in a jealous guy's back yard without him knowing it is not a good idea.

Imagine if the neighbors say "hey Bob some guy parks behind your house every morning after you go to work — who knows what kind of trouble this could lead to".

Don't get into confrontations with someone dumber than you or worse yet someone smarter!

Don't drown.

Be careful with current as you can quickly lose your footing. I've fallen through undercut embankments and had my feet caught in roots while falling forward and hanging upside down- awkward moment to say the least.

You should check in every so often and if you don't have someone come looking- be dependable with your calls as a couple false worries blows this strategy — which has happened to me — I'm pretty much on my own — if I don't show up in a day the family starts to get concerned. Do as I say not as I do.

Let someone know which loop you are starting with — have others know your line. With snow they can see where you've been and back track or go forward if they know where you were to start that day. I should leave a note on a magnet each trip out and attach it to the refrigerator.

Don't get run over by passing cars or trucks.

Don't get hit pulling out on to the road from your stops.

Don't freeze to death.
Don't bleed to death.
Don't get stuck in the mud.

Go ahead and laugh but be careful you don't get a thumb stuck in an under water trap on a drowning rod where you can't pull the stakes, can't release yourself, and can't stand in the neck high water- for me it was a beaver trap and another awkward moment.

Phone — leave it in the car if you are sure you can get back to the car.

Emergency kit

I carry items in the car and truck such as a phone, flares, fire making tools (matches and lighter), toilet paper, extra light, whistle and. I've used some of these in emergencies. In my vehicles I make sure I have a spare tire, tire pump, jumper cables, come alongs, and a tow chain. An extra key is hid outside my occasionally inconveniently locked vehicle.

To prevent freezing I pack in my first aid kit a pocket sized safety blanket, dry clothes and towel.

I prepare for darkness, (broken lights, burnt bulbs) by having spares.

> A fool dreams of wealth; a wise man, of happiness.
> — Turkish Proverbs

To Finish

Like life and trapping season our time together ends too soon. All that separates us is time and distance and it is my hope that this book serves as a well from which the present and future trapper can drink. Mink trapping to me is more than sport it is a way of connecting with the past and hoping the future will be as good as the present I'd like to think I'm a pioneer finding a new world but I know that generations that have come and gone have traveled the same paths. We can never stand in the same river twice, the water that washes across our boots today will never come back, Everything changes. Others have cleared the path and paved the way for our pastime. I hope I never find myself setting our fraternity back or taking unfair advantage of any person or animal. Juris prudence is the study of law but ethics is the study of morality. What we do when nobody is looking is a true picture of who we are. Give back.

Because we drink from wells we did not dig it is only right that we join our state and national associations. Introduce others to the sport and teach anyone interested.

Leave the streams better than we found them. It would be nice to be remembered but it is sometimes a victory to leave no foot prints. To finish and conclude — remember we were just talking about mink trapping. In the grand scheme of things how many you catch doesn't really matter. In the grand scheme of things our relevance will be what we pass along to others and especially those we love — don't forget it is all about more than just mink trapping.

Myself with my dad and brother – good memories.

Disclaimer
Check all laws, get a physical, don't assume any responsibility for violations, injury

Read books
Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors and the most potent of teachers — Charles W. Eliot

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Education Resources

Creative swiping is a great tool you can use to learn from others. Let their thoughts be the seeds for your methods and ideas. I'm not obsessed with having all of my ideas be original I'm happy to listen to the trapping industry's best and implement their ideas while enhancing any parts that I can. I call it enthusiastic borrowing. Every month I receive mailbox ideas in the form of publications such as Trapper's World, The Trapper and Predator Caller, The Trappers Post, Fur-Fish-Game, American Trapper and the Buckeye Trapper. Some publications come monthly others less often, but I learn from each.

This practice can be used at conventions, by reading books, watching videos and dvd's or by finding a mentor.

The internet has some interesting sites which include information on the following:

(National Agriculture Statistics Service) www. Nass.usda.gov
All NASS reports are available free of charge.
Related Trapping Sites- Search trapping forums
Trapperman.com
Minktrapping.com
Sullivansline.com

Professional Intellect

Professional Intellect can be developed and increased by repeated exposure to real problems encountered on the trapline. The learning curve can be steep. Intensity and repetition are critical in the development of trapping know how.

Continued learning is comprised of experimentation, understanding yourself and your experiences.

Thank You's to

Wife — Candi for never trying to change me and always supporting my endeavors. For cleaning all the clothes and other messes, for being a great mom, partner and wife.

Parents — Laird and Esther Jane Powell who always encouraged me and gave me their garage when I was only 12 for my trapping and business ventures. For dropping me off and picking me up when I wasn't old enough to drive. For always being interested in what I brought home and understanding the traps had to be checked.

My girls — Taylor and Jordyn my great daughters for being the spice of our lives and a joy to be around — you both make life exciting!

Brother Doug — Who I've always looked up to. Who took me as a kid for long walks to observe deer, and nature and on most Saturdays in the fall to hunt something.

Friends Brian Miller, Tim McMillen, for being there to share a story and ideas.

Wayne Clinger and Alan Campbell, for sharing secrets.

Herman just for being you.

Tim Rudolph and Bob Hill for keeping the truck running.

Melvin and Harvey Hostetler thanks for all the late nights skinning.

Junior Gruver for helping me catch up.

Dee Lyle who was there in the beginning.

Dee Veitz who has been there in the end.

Patty Barrett for helping me juggle it all.

Dave Fetterhoff for all your computer genius.

To all of my other co-workers,

Ron and Val for letting me use your land to learn how to hunt and trap.
To everyone who has ever let me take a coon, coyote or muskrat.
My business clients and customers who are the reason I love my job.
To my nephews Greg and Charlie thanks for all the memories.
Andrew, Courtney, Marci, Erica for the laughs.
To my granddad who gave me my first trap.
Marilyn and Pete for Hawbaker's book.
To all of my aunts, uncles, brother in laws, sister in laws, and my mother in law — Ethel — who keeps me on my toes.
Terry Defoor for a lot of welding and friendship.
Dave Weller for helping me with everything.
To Bob Noonan for all of your guidance.
To Keith Winkler for pointing me in the right direction.
To all who helped me see further by letting me stand upon their shoulders.
Thank you to all of the authors mentioned in the bibliography and those who share their ideas in print and video — you all have been responsible for my passing on fortune in pursuit of a three pound member of the weasel family.